





THE STAR WOMAN

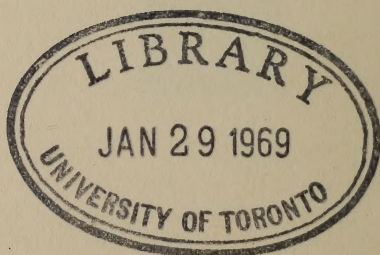
THE STAR WOMAN

BY
H. BEDFORD-JONES



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PREFACE

THE historical portions of this novel will be found to differ considerably from generally accepted versions of the events related. The prime sources utilized are both contemporary, both French, and both untranslated; namely, the diary of *Sieur Baudouin*, once a soldier and later chaplain under *Iberville*, and the amazing "*Histoire de l'Amérique Septentrionale*" of *Bacqueville de la Potherie*.

The former work, furnished me in MS. by kindness of the Newfoundland Historical Society, yielded full details regarding the Newfoundland raid. In abridged form, it was utilized by *Sieur Bacqueville*, whose work is astounding because of its remarkably distinct, yet wildly confused, combination of sources. A letter from the missionary *Bobé*, himself a student and memorialist of Canadian affairs, has informed us of *Sieur Bacqueville's* great exactitude. He had a share in much that he described; for the remainder, he drew by document or word of mouth on *Baudouin*, *Perrot*, the *Le Moynes*, *Joliet* and the *Jesuits*. The manner in which these sources can be traced through the internal evidence of his work is most interesting; the work itself cannot be translated satisfactorily, owing to its disregard of historical sequence and its jumble of unrelated documents and dictation.

In places, however, it is remarkably clear, and has been followed for the Hudson Bay events. I do not attempt to account for the extraordinary discrepancies which exist between these events as herein set forth and as related by A. C. Laut in "The Conquest of the Great Northwest." This discrepancy exists in nearly every detail and is almost incredible, since the latter work quotes Bacqueville as an authority. The same discrepancy exists between its account of Iberville's earlier exploits on the bay and that which Iberville himself presumably furnished Sieur Bacqueville. The two versions are totally different. I have followed the 1753 edition of the *Histoire*, which was a careful reprint of the second edition of 1722. I believe that no copies are known to exist of the first edition, of 1716. Miss Laut quotes a much later edition. Perhaps that is why her account is so astonishing—as, for example, making one of Iberville's ships, the *Violent*, founder in the straits, when this ship was not even with his squadron; and when we are expressly told that it was a small brigantine named the *Esquimeau* which went down. Nor is this the most amazing error in the volume named.

But now let me cry "peccavi!" on my own account. Iberville was not with Bienville at the Bay de Verde burning, although I put him there. I have purposely ignored the fact that Serigny was blown into the Danish river on his way to Nelson; and I have no authority for bringing poor Moon there—though where he did go I have been unable to discover, as he dropped from sight between the straits and Nelson.

By introducing the *Albemarle* as Deakin's ship, I have

tried to resolve what was to me a sore problem—perhaps for lack of any authoritative English account of the bay action. After the capture of Nelson our friend Aide-major Charles Claude le Roy—otherwise Sieur de Bacqueville de la Potherie—loaded the looted furs and the prisoners aboard a ship of this name and promptly lost her on the shallows of the river-mouth. I find no other mention of such a ship; no *Albemarle* formed a part of either Fletcher's or Iberville's squadron. Since all the furs and prisoners were put aboard her, she must have been a vessel of goodly size and not a mere sloop belonging to the forts.

Despite the dictum of learned persons that the term "Canadian" is not found prior to the end of the eighteenth century, I have used it advisedly. In De Beaudoncourt's "History of Canada," based on French and American documents, occurs this note:

"Ce mot de *Canada* ou *Canata* veut dire, en langue du pais, royaume des cabanes. Il a survécu à tous les autres, il est avec celui de Montréal le seul datant de l'époque de Jacques Cartier."

The term Canadian is constantly used by Bacqueville and by Baudouin; a statement by the latter infers that it was likewise employed by the English to differentiate the born Canadians from the French proper. The entire history of North America at this period is largely written in names of Canadian families; as though the terrific struggle of the French pioneers against man and nature had aroused in the ensuing generation all the

dormant blood of knightly and heroic ancestry, so that the same names etched in the icy annals of Hudson Bay are to be found burned into the cypress of Louisiana.

H. BEDFORD-JONES

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BOOK I

THE STAR OF DREAMS

THE STAR WOMAN

CHAPTER I

THE MAN AND THE STAR

CRAWFORD, snuffed the candle on the table beside him, turned the page of his book, and went on reading; he felt the loneliness of Pentagoet. In the wide hearth crackled a new-laid fire. Outside, the trees groaned frostily, snapping in the night wind.

The room showed an amazing mixture of civilized culture and savage magnificence. Candle-tray and snuffers were of chased silver, beside the wine bottle on the table was a heavy gold chalice, above the fireplace hung crossed Toledo blades, and books shone brown in a corner case. The light flickered on a careless pile of beaver and elk-skins in one corner. Other skins strewed the walls, mingled with belts and "arms" of wampum or beadwork. A rack on the mantel held several pipes, all of Indian make; one was a large calumet of white stone girded with silver, a pipe heavy with fate not yet fulfilled, and affecting lives of men. A tomahawk on the mantel had a string of black wampum about the handle, several dried scalps woven in among the wampum shells.

So much for the room. The man presented that same singular combination of savagery and refinement. His face was long and thinly chiselled, his eyes wide and

heavy-lidded, his mouth large, humorous, dangerous. He was of medium height; in the firelight his hair shone reddish, and lines of hardship touched his face with stern self-mastery. A beaver coat wrapped him to the waist. Against stiff buckskin nether garments stood out a sheathed knife and a slender, deadly tomahawk; beaded ceremonial moccasins, far too large for him, encased his feet. Before the blazing fire were drying his own moccasins, stuffed out with rags, still steaming as if soaked with wet snow or water. His hands, resting on book and table, were large and powerful, the wrists showing half-healed scars of manacles.

Crawford put out a hand to the pipe beside him, filled it with kinnikinnick from the bag, held it above the candle. He relaxed again in his chair, puffing, but his eyes went to the door and then he took the pipe from his mouth, listening. Those eyes of his were startling in their alertness—light-blue eyes that fairly stabbed. His wide lips smiled, as if at his own alarm.

“The shore ice grinding, that’s all,” he murmured. “Folly to feel nervous here! I wish that Micmac rascal would bring the cold pasty he promised me. Wine on a stomach that has seen no food in two days is a hollow mockery.”

Rising, Crawford crossed to the door and swung it open.

He stood for a moment on the threshold, staring out at the night. Stars blazed in the dark sky. A dozen feet outside the house ran the black line of a palisade, broken by an open gate directly in front of the doorway. From where he stood, Crawford could see the abandoned

lines of old Fort Pentagoet to one side, and beyond this the long white line of the ice-rimmed shore; Penobscot Bay was not frozen over, and the dark swishing of waves mingled with the creaky whine of trees and the grind of ice.

"A lonely place for a baron of France!" said Crawford, puffing at his pipe. "Yet I wish he were here, with his Indian wives and his henchmen. Fiend take this solitude! I've had enough of it. Why couldn't he leave more than one solitary Micmac on the place?"

He shivered, turned, closed the door, and went back to his chair. He took his book and opened it—then his head lifted and he looked again at the door. He caught a new sound, the scrape of a stiff moccasin, a low groan, the fumble of stiff fingers at the latch. The door swung open.

Into the room came an Indian, wrapped in furs, holding in both hands a great silver dish. He advanced a step into the room, kicked the door shut, stood motionless. While Crawford stared at him, a frightful expression of horror leaped across his brown face—then the dish fell from his hands, he pitched forward, lay outstretched. The long shagreen handle of a knife stood out from between his shoulder-blades. The knife must have caught him an instant before he opened the door.

Crawford sat motionless. For a long instant the thing seemed incredible, uncanny, supernatural. He knew that except for this Micmac and himself, the establishment of Baron de Saint-Castin at the head of Penobscot Bay was temporarily deserted. No war-parties were afoot hereabouts; the year 1697 had opened with peace to

Acadia, at least. Crawford had just come overland from Boston and knew that all was quiet.

Then, abruptly, before Crawford could move, the door was again flung open and a man stood framed against the night, pistol in hand. He grinned at Crawford—a great figure whose clothes were white with ice-rime and snow, his bearded face massive, brutal.

“Not a move, Saint-Castin!” rang out his voice.

Crawford smiled.

“Oh! I thought you were Saint-Castin!” he said.

The other started.

“Eh? What’s this? No one about——”

“Come in and shut the door!” said Crawford, and laid down his book. “I’m cursed glad of company. The baron is away, with all his people—gone to visit his father-in-law, Madockawando. Up the Penobscot, I suppose. Where the devil did you come from?”

“From the devil,” said the other, and laughed.

Then he whistled shrilly. Two other men joined him. All three advanced into the room, closed the door, stood staring over pistols at the seated figure of Crawford, whose calm attitude puzzled them.

From outside came a shout, then a burst of voices, the stamp of running feet, a sudden flicker of torches. Surveying his visitors, Crawford perceived that the first was obviously in command—his dominant air was beyond mistake. The second man was a burly ruffian, brutish, reeking of rum. The third man was tall and thin, saturnine, hawk-nosed, with a certain air of down-at-heel gentility; his darting black eyes were very intelligent.

"This is not the baron," said this last rogue, blinking at Crawford. "Not our man at all, cap'n!"

"Correct," said Crawford amiably. "If one of you gentlemen will set that venison pasty on the table, I'd be obliged. I reached here half an hour ago, have not eaten for two days, and am more interested in the venison than in you. If you want the baron, go up the Penobscot and look for him."

"Cool one!" observed the massive leader, and suddenly laughed. "We've lost the quarry, lads! Saint-Castin's away with all his people. Bose, go out and take charge of the looting. Have everything taken to the boats; no eating or drinking until the men are aboard. When you've had your fill, come ashore with one boat and join us here. No one is to loot this part of the establishment until I'm ready. Frontin and I will join our friend here over the pasty—if he hasn't eaten for two days, we've not eaten for three. Go!"

The burly ruffian departed. The saturnine man stooped to the pasty and lifted it to the table, shoving aside the body of the Micmac. The commander, thrusting away his pistol, stepped forward to Crawford and grinned widely.

"Well! Your name?"

"Harry Crawford, at your service."

The two men stopped dead still, staring at him. Crawford, faintly amused, smiled.

"Why, zounds!" broke out the leader. "Hal Crawford, the pirate! Two hundred pound on his head in Boston!"

"This is not Boston," said Crawford, though his

eyes narrowed. "Plague take you, stare! I'm for the pasty."

He whipped out his knife and attacked the contents of the battered silver dish. The two men exchanged a glance, then without more ado pulled forward a couple of stools and joined in the assault, knives and fingers ravenously at work.

No word was exchanged, but Crawford was by this time perfectly aware of the profession, if not the identity, of his visitors. During the past forty years the whole American coast, even into Hudson Bay, had been swept by pirates; small fry, most of them, fur pirates, rum pirates, reckless sailormen who would land to sack a town or would lay a ship aboard and count it all in the day's work. Others followed the freebooting trade more seriously and made of it a profession. Of this latter class, thought Crawford, were the visitors. He had somewhere heard the name of Frontin—and presently placed it.

Within five minutes the pasty, among three famished men, had been scraped to the last crumb, and the bottle of wine was empty. Crawford leaned back, refilled his pipe, and surveyed the other two men with a whimsical air.

"Help yourselves to pipes, gentlemen! This house, as the Spanish say, is yours."

Frontin, the thin man, grinned in his saturnine way.

"That is well. May I introduce you to my captain, Vanderberg the valiant?"

"The honor is mine," said Crawford, nodding. "I already recognized Captain Vanderberg. I believe Fron-

tenac has offered five thousand livres for his head? Come, Lieutenant Frontin, you have a chance at fortune! Deliver him to Quebec and me to Boston——”

Vanderberg, who was a jolly rascal of Dutch extraction, bellowed a laugh at this.

“Ho! I like you, Crawford. Finding you here, the baron gone, the house ours for the looting, means our luck has changed. And, damme, we need the change! We were battered by a French corvette, storm-wracked, short of men and shorter of food. We bore up for Boston but were warned off; we had absent-mindedly sacked a Bostonnais off Jamaica, and the good folk had heard of it, so the port was closed to us. We started for New York, but were blown offshore by the gale which has only just abated. So, if Frontin had not known of this place and its chances of loot, food and wine——”

Vanderberg expressively waved one huge paw and went to the fireplace. He took down the white stone calumet. Frontin, his saturnine gaze on Crawford, spoke.

“So you are also on the account?”

“Not at all,” said Crawford coolly.

Vanderberg swung around with a heavy stare.

“What? But we heard of you in Boston as a pirate——”

“Exactly, in Boston,” said Crawford. “Having once been a Jacobite in opinion, I took refuge in Massachusetts. There, some months ago, I was recognized, apprehended, and sent to the Barbados as a slave. I got away with the help of some buccaneers, but having convictions against the life of a pirate, I made my way to New York. It was my intention to reach the Iroquois

country, certain Mohawk chiefs being my friends. I failed to bribe old Fletcher, however, so he sent me in chains to Boston. I escaped, headed for Acadia and New France, and reached this spot half an hour before you."

Vanderberg exploded a volley of admiring oaths at this tale.

"You have money?"

"I need none."

"Well, you shall join us! I need a second lieutenant."

"You honor me," said Crawford drily. "But, as I have said, I cherish certain convictions against piracy."

"Bah! We shall prey only on the French."

"Unfortunately, I have no quarrel with the French."

Vanderberg stared.

"*Hein?* What has that to do with it?"

"Everything. You will readily perceive that a man who is destitute of everything except principles, would be a fool to abandon his principles."

"The foul fiend fly away with you! Then we shall raid the coast to the south——"

"Unhappily, I have compunctions about letting English blood."

"But you are a pirate, known as such!"

"I have the name, yes, but not the honour of deserving it," said Crawford. "Reputation, my dear captain, is a bubble blown from the pipe of fools; let us disregard it. My quest, or if you so prefer, my urge to freedom, draws me into the north or west; I care not which, so it be into strange lands. Now, if I have need of a ship I am entirely willing to seize any French, English or pirate ship

which will further my purpose. I am not willing, however, to seize a ship and kill men merely in order to commit robbery. The distinction may be a trifle subtle to your mind, but there it is."

Vanderberg blinked heavily at this speech. Crawford relaxed in his chair and puffed his pipe alight, quite at his ease. Frontin, grinning delightedly, watched the two men in obvious amusement. Apparently a cynical rogue, this Frontin was not at all the cynic he pretended to be.

"You are mad!" said Vanderberg, beginning to lose his good nature.

"On the contrary," said Frontin, "he is entirely sane. That is a profound truth, my honest captain. Very few men are entirely——"

"Shut up!" snapped the pirate, and turned to Crawford. "Who the devil are you against, then?"

"Nobody," said Crawford calmly, "and everybody."

"But you're a Jacobite."

"I was; I am not. I have perceived the fallacy of giving allegiance to another man and fighting for him. I shall now fight for myself alone."

"Then you are going on the account?" asked Vanderberg, rather helplessly.

"Not at all. I said—fight for myself! Why should I fight for money? Why should I rob and murder in order to take other men's money and goods?"

Vanderberg swallowed hard.

"You are certainly mad!"

"No," said Crawford. "I am free."

Frontin jerked his stool forward and looked hard at Crawford.

"Now let me have my say," he said, and rubbed his long nose. "You are free, and you are also sane. You are something like Saint-Castin was once, before the king's jackal brought him to heel. I suppose you think that it is a lucky chance that you are here?"

"Something of the sort," said Crawford, wondering at the man's manner.

"No; it is a coincidence. You never heard of the Star of Dreams?"

"No."

"Saint-Castin and I got it together, in the old days," said Frontin. "Now, consider! We want you with us, for sensible reasons which will presently appear. We came here for more than one reason—sensible reasons, which lie in the chapel yonder," and he nodded his head toward a closed door. "The cap'n would plunder a chapel, but I won't let him. If you will argue with us sensibly, and listen to reason, we may reach an understanding."

"That is entirely possible," said Crawford, with a slow chuckle at the man's air.

Frontin rose.

"Good! Take up the candle and come with us. We have time to look and talk, while those men of ours fill their bellies and guzzle wine."

Crawford stood up and took the candlestick from the table. He was at once amused, puzzled, and keenly interested by these two men. He saw that Vanderberg was a genial pirate, no more, no less—a brawny ruffian, who was for the moment in good humour, and who could pass swiftly to brute ferocity or brute lust. A man to be

met with utmost force, primitive in all instincts, actuated only by an avid greed for gold or gain.

Frontin was different—a Frenchman very likely, a man of high intelligence, capable alike of vicious cruelty and lofty ideals. Vanderberg was the arm that smote, Frontin was the brain that planned the blow. Of the two, the latter was the deadlier.

Frontin crossed to the closed door as though he knew the place well, and, his hand on the latch, turned to look at Crawford.

“You love the English more than the French?”

Crawford shrugged.

“I think not. One buys scalps, the other tortures prisoners. I deny them both.”

“In order to deny, one must affirm.”

“Precisely. I affirm—freedom, since you must have it so. I seek only the chance to be free, to look beyond the horizon, to leave wars and the quarrels of kings behind me.”

“Your aim, then?”

“To be myself,” said Crawford, a little wearily.

Frontin flung open the door, a laugh on his lips.

“The private chapel of Jean Vincent de l’Abadie, Baron de Saint-Castin. Your cap, cap’n; respect my religious scruples.”

Vanderberg grunted, but took off his fur cap.

Holding up the candle, Crawford gazed upon a small room at the farther end of which was an altar; there was nothing bare here, but all was a glow of colour. Pictures, silver candlesticks, a large crucifix, Portuguese reliquaries of walnut with oddly curved glass front and

sides, white cloths broidered in gold. The room was bitter cold.

"Keep those itching fingers quiet, cap'n," said Frontin, and stepped forward. Crawford glanced at Vanderberg, who was staring with eyes that glowed lustfully.

Frontin genuflected, then stepped to one of the reliquaries, and from it took a small object. With a shiver, he motioned back to the main room, and Crawford obeyed. The three men came back to the fireplace, Frontin closing the chapel door behind them. He then extended the object which he had brought from the chapel.

Crawford, taking it, saw a five-pointed star six inches in diameter made of soft virgin gold. In the centre was set a large emerald, and other emeralds ran out to the points. Some were flawed, others were remarkably clear and deep in colour.

"Old?" he asked.

"A hundred years or so," said Frontin. "From Peru."

Vanderberg shoved his bulk between them and clutched the star. He examined it greedily, breathing hoarsely, his piggish eyes glinting in the firelight.

"This is no sacred thing!" he broke out accusingly. "I shall take it. You can have nothing to say about it. I swore to you that I would touch no sacred object——"

"You mistake, my captain," said Frontin, a sudden cold accent in his voice. "Turn it over and you will see the name of the Archangel Michael graven on the back. It was the belief that each archangel had his abode in a certain star, you understand. This was a votive offering. As such, it is sacred. Shall we argue the matter?"

This question came icily. Frontin's hand was at his

belt; his eyes met the gaze of Vanderberg in sharply direct challenge. Then the laugh of Crawford cut in between them.

"This theological argument would delight our friend Saint-Castin!"

Vanderberg grunted and shoved the star at Frontin.

"Take it, papist! Now tell him about it."

Frontin bowed, not without a certain courtliness. He turned to Crawford.

"Once upon a time, I went to a certain place with Saint-Castin; on the Newfoundland coast. Indians led us. We found the wreck of an old Spanish ship, well-hidden, or rather, I found it. Saint-Castin was taken ill and could not go to the spot with me. I brought this back to him as a sample of what the wreck contained. Then some Boston fishing-sloops bore down on us, and we had to flee. Later, events drove me on the road of destiny. Saint-Castin was never able to find the spot where the wreck lies, without my help; and he did not have it. Now I am on my way to that place. I shall enrich Cap'n Vanderberg and his men. Come with us and you shall be enriched also. You perceive that our reasons for coming here were sensible. What do you say?"

Crawford stood for a moment in thought.

"Why this offer?" he responded at length. "Why are you so anxious to enrich me? That, as you must agree, is neither sensible nor reasonable."

Frontin laughed gaily.

"No? Then listen. We have seventeen men including ourselves. They are scum of the Indies—negroes,

branded men, escaped slaves. They suffer from cold and famine. We officers are two, or if you count Bose, three. We need one other man to keep control in our own hands. They will not go farther north, yet farther north we must go. They fear the French. They shrink from working a ship adrift with ice. But this place supplies us with food, wine, furs. On the Newfoundland coast we shall get cod in plenty; we may pick up an English ship or two, with luck. Is this sensible?"

"Eminently so," said Crawford. "You need me, it seems. Let's smoke over it."

He picked up his pipe, knocked it out, filled it with the tobacco and willow-bark.

"Suppose you let me take another look at that emerald thing—what did you call it? Star of Dreams?"

Frontin, who still held the star, pushed it across the table. He, too, got a pipe from the mantel and filled it. Vanderberg remained silent, puffing lustily.

Crawford looked again at the star and perceived a ring at one of the points, by which it might be fastened on a thong. The thing had no great intrinsic value, since few of the emeralds were fine stones, but it held that peculiar beauty which comes of primitive artistry and crude technique guided by instinctively flawless taste.

"Star of Dreams," said Frontin. "It was Saint-Castin called it that name."

"A good name for it," and Crawford nodded. "I think I shall keep it. I like the thing."

Vanderberg, who at most times was somewhat afraid of his saturnine lieutenant, gaped at this remark. Craw-

ford looked up and met the suddenly piercing gaze of Frontin.

"You jest?" said the latter.

"Not at all." Crawford looked again at the star in his hand. "The name and the object appeal to my sentimental nature, awaken poetic fancies in me, I assure you. This thing might symbolize the star of freedom which I pursue. At all events, it makes a certain appeal to me which I can not resist."

Vanderberg grinned.

"So, Frontin! So! Another theological argument?" Crawford glanced up and smiled.

"Not at all. I do not propose a theft, but an exchange which will be more than even—which will, in fact, be greatly to the advantage of our host's chapel."

He reached inside his shirt and pulled out a thong on which was strung a blazing jewel, which, after unknotting the thong, he laid upon the table. An exclamation burst from Frontin.

"But—this is the Order of St. Louis!"

"Exactly," said Crawford, with a nod.

"His Most Catholic Majesty once decorated me with it, and from a feeling of sentiment I preserved it through many vicissitudes. Now, having abandoned sentiment, kings and other old-world follies together, I am very glad to leave this jewel here. You shall put it in Saint-Castin's reliquary. In place of it I will take the Star of Dreams, as being worth infinitely less in money, and infinitely more in the greatest things, which are intangible. I trust that you will have no scruples in the matter of such an exchange? The Blessed Virgin, or St.

Michael, or whoever is the patron of yonder chapel, will certainly profit by the trade. St. Louis for St. Michael—eh?”

Frontin compressed his lips, gazing at the jewelled star. But Vanderberg was also gazing at the same thing, with lustful and incredulous eyes, for in truth it was a jewel of great worth. Then, abruptly, Vanderberg blurted out his mind.

“Ha! Frontin—will you let him make fools of us? Leave the relic where we found it, kill him, and take these jewels. What’s to hinder, eh?”

“What, indeed?” murmured Frontin, raising his eyes and looking hard at Crawford. The latter, who was stringing the Star of Dreams on his leather thong, laughed a little.

“Nonsense!” he responded cheerfully, and apparently without heeding the black regard. “Before you two fools could out pistol, cock flint and draw fire, my tomahawk would split the cap’n’s skull and my knife be in Frontin’s heart. A pity, that, for Frontin is a man of some sense. Nay, I learned knife and tomahawk play from my Mohawk friends, gentlemen! Now, my dear Frontin, if you wish to dispute my wishes in regard to this star, I am entirely at your service.”

He leaned back and met the stare of Frontin with an ingenuous air. Frontin burst into a laugh, rose, and picked up the jewel of St. Louis.

“Bah! I am satisfied. Cap’n, don’t be a fool; we need this man, and I like him, and the three of us shall gut the galleon of treasure. What are a few jewels, when gold is waiting to be carried off?”

Vanderberg sat back and puffed at the big calumet. Frontin crossed to the door of the chapel and vanished in the little, cold, dark room. Crawford nodded to the big pirate.

"An odd soul, this Frontin of ours! I am glad that he reverences something, for it raises him in my esteem. By the way, you made a serious error in hurling a knife into that redskin Micmac. He could have given you some highly interesting information."

"What, then?" asked Frontin, returning from the chapel and closing its door.

"That Saint-Castin was expected home some time this evening. If I were you, I'd send a man or two up the river-trail."

Vanderberg, exploding an oath of consternation and startled dismay, leaped to his feet. But Frontin was already darting for the outside door. Jerking it open, he whistled shrilly. A shout responded, and he turned, his dark face alive with excitement.

"Bose is coming now. Crawford, you devil! If you hadn't told us this——"

"Well, haven't I told you?" Crawford rose, laughing. "There are some Winter garments in the bedroom adjoining. Since we're bound for Newfoundland, I think I'll help myself, and advise you to do the same."

Stepping into an adjoining room, Crawford swiftly provided himself with a large furlined wool capote, hat, and a splendid pair of moccasins. He returned to find Bose and half a dozen men around the doorway, Vanderberg bawling orders at them. Two men with fusils were sent to keep watch over the trail that led up-river, the others

were set to work looting the interior of the house. They reported that plenty of supplies had been taken aboard the ketch, anchored in the bay.

The men hurled themselves upon the rooms, rushing down to the waiting boat with loads of everything they found—blankets, weapons, trading-goods, silver, snow-shoes, furs. Frontin, meantime, stood on guard at the chapel door, defending it against intrusion, and Crawford watched the man with a trace of admiration. Whatever his real name, despite his dark past history and his present occupation, this Frenchman was adamant in upholding his principles; and Crawford, whose whimsical talk of principles and convictions was really more true than he cared to admit seriously, found it in his heart to respect and like this Frontin.

In the midst of the ransacking, Crawford heard the plunging bark of a fusil. He whirled upon Vanderberg.

"You're caught. Get your men to the boat, quick! Wait there for me. I'll hold off and gain you plenty of time."

Seizing from the mantel the large tomahawk which he had retained as his own loot, Crawford darted from the room, leaped out into the snow, and heard the shrill whistles calling the men. A shout came from ahead, around the corner of the buildings and up the river-trail; then arose the biting Abnaki war whoop. Crawford understood that the two men so recently set as an outpost had been encountered by some of Saint-Castin's returning party.

Another fusil banged out its message, another Abnaki yell went barking up into the frosty night. Ahead of

him Crawford saw the two seamen stumbling back through the trodden snow of the trail.

"To the boat, quickly!" he snapped at them, then threw back his head and sent a long, quavering cry of four syllables sounding up through the forest. It was the most feared and dreaded sound that could be heard in French or Algonquin ears—a sound to stop the very heart-beats of Abnaki or Caniba or Malicete warriors, a sound that, coming from the throat of the unknown raiders, would bring Saint-Castin himself to a cautious halt. It was the war-cry of the Mohawks.

"Sassakouay!"

It rose fierce and sharp with the true intonation that Crawford's red friends had taught him so carefully, ringing up through the frosty trees, a veritable peal of doom to Algonquin ears.

"Kouay! Sassakouay!"

A distant yelp, like the frightened outcry of a street cur pursued by a mastiff, came from the depths of the forest, then silence. Crawford, smiling grimly, turned about and regained the front of the palisade. He found Frontin waiting there, alone.

"They'll scout cautiously," he said, laughing a little. "We've plenty of time. That Mohawk whoop will hold them back more firmly than many muskets."

"You took a chance that we'd wait for you," said Frontin.

"Not a bit of it. I knew you."

Frontin grinned at that, and the two men were friends.

CHAPTER II

HE WHO ACCEPTS AN OMEN, ACCEPTS RESPONSIBILITY

CRAWFORD could make out little of his new environment until morning, which disclosed the ketch *L'Irondelle* standing east for Cape Sable and leaning over to a whirl of wind and snow from the northwest.

The ketch was a miserable craft. Her foremast was set nearly amidships and was square rigged, with a sprit-sail forward, while the main carried a fore-and-aft mainsail and a tiny square topsail above. She boasted three twelve-pounders to a side, leaked like a sieve, was alive with rats and vermin and was rotten of rigging, canvas and wood from truck to keelson; her sole virtue was speed in the water. As Vanderberger explained apologetically, he had left Jamaica hoping from day to day to get a better ship and augment his crew at one blow, but luck had been against him. He was complacently hopeful of picking up an English ship near Newfoundland, unless a French frigate ran him down in Cabot Strait.

"Those cursed French and English are always fighting in these parts," he declared mournfully, "and one can never tell when a fleet will show over the horizon."

The men forward, under the hulking ruffian Bose, were a hard lot. Some were escaped negro slaves from Hispaniola, some were French, and the remainder were

Dutch and English. All had for the past two years been engaged in the savage fighting and raids centring on Jamaica, which had been an open prey to all men since the great earthquake wiped away its defences and defenders. Most of them were drunk, for during the night Vanderberg had served out rum enough to conceal the fact that he was heading east, and when the accession of Crawford as third in command was proclaimed, it passed the vote almost without comment.

"So long as we have no sun," said Frontin in disgust, "the rascals will hold the course we set and ask no questions. Nine-tenths of them steer by the mark on the card and cannot read the directions. But, my friend, when they discover that we head north—ha! Then you'll see crimson snow. I've told them that we're steering south, and have altered the card in case any of those who can read investigate the matter."

Crawford shrugged.

"Better to meet the thing squarely—but let be. You can navigate?"

"I was once *lieutenant de vaisseau* in his most Christian Majesty's navy."

This was almost the only time in their long companionship that Frontin ever referred to his mysterious past.

So the *Irondelle* drove east through long hours of grey day and black night, while ever the bitter gale swept down out of the northwest, and Vanderberg matched the shrieking winds with his deep-chested roar. A rare seaman was the Dutchman, knowing his ship as a book and holding her under a press of sail that sent her scudding like a race-horse.

Bitter cold it was aboard the ketch. The men, inured to privations, made no murmur; since the ballast was all in rum from French Hispaniola, the black cook was kept busy through the long hours dealing out hot grog without cessation, and if the men went about their work half-drunk, they had need to be so. The pumps had to be manned continually, their monotonous clacking never coming to an end. Now and again the rotten rigging would give way, and up must go the men to reeve new lines through frozen sheaves; twice the rotten canvas blew out and had to be taken in, mended and patched under the driving snow, sent up again; and the little main topsail blew away altogether and vanished up the sky. At this, Vanderberg bellowed gusty laughter.

"It's a sign we're not bound for hell this cruise, lads! Spell the pumps, lest they freeze, and the rest of you fall to work with axes."

This, indeed, was the sternest job of all, one that had no ending and was dangerous into the bargain. Gripping the frozen life-lines, the men spread out and chopped away the gathered snow and the ice, forming thicker every moment. In the night this had to be done with lanterns bobbing, black seas rising up out of the darkness and sweeping the decks, new ice forming as fast as the old was cut away, the blunt bows of the ketch smashing over the roaring seas and a hissing rush of water rising and sweeping away as each sea passed on.

Despite all this, despite their maudlin profanity and half-mad frenzy of exertion, the men were cheerful enough, for this was a new sort of privation to them.

Hunger and thirst and burning sun they were all too accustomed to meet. Now they had taken aboard no lack of wine, good caribou meat both frozen and smoked, corn and meal and other viands, furs and warm clothing galore, with no little booty in beaver and small loot.

The gale held through the second day, though the snow had ceased and the bitter cold had lessened, so that it seemed to the men they were indeed heading south.

"So long as they do not suspect, gain no sight of sun or stars, and do not try to use their heads in the matter, all well and good," said Frontin. The three officers were gathered in the stern cabin at noon, leaving the deck to Bose. "They bear Crawford good will for the way he halted Saint-Castin's redskins and let us get off without harm."

Crawford grimaced. "The good will of vermin is not valuable——"

"Pardon, but you will find that vermin bite!"

Vanderberg shoved into the talk, glaring at Frontin from bloodshot, sleep-lacking eyes.

"Listen to me! We are heading northeast. The chart shows that we shall run into a cape named Sable. What about it?"

"Rest assured." Frontin's hawk-nosed, bitter features were confident. "I know these waters well and need none of your charts, which are not accurate."

"We are in your hands," said Vanderberg, with a nod. "Now tell me just where we are going, for questions are going to be asked before long. That devil Bose already suspects that we're not driving south."

Frontin spilled a little rum on the table, out of the great golden chalice that had belonged to Saint-Castin. With his finger he drew the outline of a promontory.

"This is a point of land half-way around Newfoundland. Here on one side is Conception Bay, on the other Trinity Bay. Here in the end of the point is what the English call a cove—a small harbour, without much protection, therefore without ice. All along the shore are very high cliffs. At one point along these cliffs, near the cove, there is a ledge of rock that extends back into the cliffs like a shallow cave; it is just above high water, and cannot be reached in Summer because of tremendous tide-currents and whirlpools that lie before it. Upon this ledge is the wreck of the galleon, undoubtedly flung there in some furious storm."

Crawford interposed.

"Saint-Castin was there before with you; why could he not have come again? Why could not the galleon have been plundered by the English?"

Frontin smiled thinly.

"An Indian report of the wreck drew us there—some hunters had seen it from the cliffs, or thought they had. Saint-Castin was taken very ill and had to stay aboard our ship. I climbed down to the place from the cliffs, but would not do it again for a thousand pieces of eight. The poor baron was too ill to understand anything about it, and I most certainly did not tell him the truth, so there you are. As for any one else having found the wreck, that is impossible. No English settlements are close by, the wreck is invisible from the sea, and boats cannot come near the place in Summer because of the

whirlpools. In Winter, I believe there is sufficient shore-ice for us to land a mile or so from the spot and make our way to it easily. Many ships come with supplies from England for the various settlements during the Winter, and we shall have no trouble exchanging this craft of ours for a better ship. We shall not be disturbed at the work, as the English settlers stay close at home in the Winter, except the hunters who seek caribou inland."

Vanderberg looked doubtfully at Crawford.

"You are content?"

"Me—content?" Crawford laughed slightly. "My dear cap'n, I have little interest in this wreck, I assure you. If there is any gold, which I strongly doubt, a bit of it may be of assistance to me."

"The devil! If you've so cursed little interest, why are you with us?"

"Because you are heading north. Two points of the compass draw me; one is north, the other is west. If I had a ship of my own, I would head it for Hudson's Bay; if I were ashore with an open trail, I would head into the west. Since I must temporize with destiny, I am here."

"Sink me if I can understand you!" growled Vanderberg, but Frontin uttered a low laugh.

"Perhaps you will understand him too well one of these days, my cap'n!"

"What do you mean by that?" said the badgered Dutchman, glaring.

Frontin shrugged and winked at Crawford.

"I am like the Sybil of Cumæ—my meanings show

only in the course of time. But the excellent *Irondelle* is plunging heavily; shall we go above and clear the fore-castle of ice?"

The three of them tramped to the deck, and Frontin's whistle summoned the weary men.

That night the gale moderated, though the stars did not show, and it had sunk by morning to a light breeze off the land which brought down a rolling bank of fog. After daybreak the wind freshened, and beneath its influence and that of the sun the fog slowly began to shred apart and dissipate.

Crawford was standing watch when, without warning, the ketch suddenly slid through thinning fog into the brilliant sunlight of open day. Behind, the grey wall of fog went writhing down upon the horizon, and off the starboard bow was the morning sun, blazing upon a cloudless sky and a glittering blue sea unmarked by any patch of sail or purple loom of land.

Sudden warmth pervaded the ship, and the watch on deck gratefully relaxed to its comfort. Crawford was standing beside the helm when he saw the man all agape, staring from sea to sky; a shout came from forward, and men pointed to the sun, and there arose a roar of discussion.

"Where away be we going, master?" queried the helmsman. "Ha' the sun changed his bed?"

Crawford chuckled.

"We're bound north for Newfoundland, lad. North for gold and Spanish plate, in a place the skipper knows of. It's there for the taking, and no fighting either; in and

take it, out and sail south again to New York or where you will, and spend the broad pieces. Yet those fools for'ard don't want to go north!"

The helmsman hesitated, then grinned.

"I'm with 'ee, master. Hast a pistol?"

Crawford shook his head and refused the proffered weapon. Knife and tomahawk were at his belt, and he wanted no more. Also, that large tomahawk of Saint-Castin's was nosed into the rail behind him, and he quietly stepped over and secured it. Trouble was close, for Bose and the other men were now on deck, all clustered in an excited knot.

Now the knot burst, and aft strode the hulking figure of Bose, bearded and uncouth as any bear, with the men trailing to right and left. The ketch had but a slightly raised quarter-deck or poop; Crawford strode forward to the ladder of two steps and waited, secure in the knowledge that the helmsman would not pistol him in the back. The fourteen men came to a halt, sullen and anxious and alarmed, and Bose stepped out a pace, glowering at Crawford.

"Master, we be headed nor'east by the sun!"

"True," said Crawford, his light blue eyes searching into the ring of faces. "We're for Newfoundland, where Spanish gold is waiting for us, and no Frenchmen around to hinder——"

A storm of outcries went up in English, Dutch and French, the protest breaking in an angry wave. Bose flung about, silenced it with a roar, then swung again on Crawford.

"This is a company matter," said he, "and we'll take no orders from you that haven't been voted on. North we'll not go——"

Crawford's eyes and voice bit out at him like cold steel.

"You dog, you! North you'll go, and the rest of you!"

There was a moment of silence, so shocked and taken aback were they by this speech. Then Bose whipped out a pistol and lifted it.

The next instant it was dashed from his hand, as the tomahawk whirled and glittered and knocked the weapon over the rail. Crawford put his hand to the second axe at his belt and laughed.

"That's it, eh? Now, bullies, who wants it fair between the eyes? Fair warning, lads——"

Bose backed hastily into the crowd, but from the other men came a storm of oaths. Then a huge negro at the right of the gang moved suddenly.

"Down with him!" he shouted in French, and from his hand a pistol roared.

The bullet shaved Crawford's neck and left a red weal to mark its passing; then the keen axe that flamed in the sunlight took the giant squarely between the eyes and sank into the skull, and the negro pitched backward against the bulwark, where he kicked convulsively and died.

"Knife to the next," said Crawford, and took the knife ready for the cast. But the men shrank, for this sort of play was new to them. And as they hesitated, Crawford spat forth an order.

"For'ard with you! The cap'n will tell you of our course and where the gold awaits us; so vote all you cursed please, but don't come to me with pistols out. For'ard with you! Hal Crawford goes north, and you with him!"

Then he leaped at them, catching Bose a buffet that knocked the hulking fellow across the deck. Knives flamed, curses filled the air with wild outcry, and as the men still hesitated, the powerful bellow of Vanderberg arose. The cap'n leaped on deck, with Frontin at his heels.

"What's this?" cried Vanderberg, a pistol in each hand.

"Nothing," said Crawford, turning aft. "I was demonstrating to these good fellows of yours that an Indian axe is swifter than a pistol. The demonstration is satisfactory. If you'll break out a little rum, and tell these lads of the wrecked galleon that we go to sack, the company will vote for the north. Two of you lads throw that black fellow overside and give me that tomahawk."

Vanderberg strode forward. Frontin looked at Crawford, and grinned thinly.

"You've cowed them," said he. "Now watch your back o' dark nights."

"Not I," said Crawford, and pointed forward. "They'll fight for me now. You'll see. They'll be all for the north venture."

And a roar of applause to Vanderberg's tale of gold approved his prediction. Thus easily were the wild, childish men swung to any purpose.

So, after troublous days, the *Irondelle* came to rest in a little cove amid beetling cliffs, fast moored and well-

sheltered against anything but a blow direct from the north.

She had not reached her goal without misadventure. Off the Banks she had raised three sail of the line, one foggy morning—French frigates, which only her virtue of speed enabled her to escape. Of the thirteen hands forward, one man had slipped on an icy shroud and fallen to his death, another had been knifed in a quarrel; this reduced the total aboard to fifteen. Wilful waste had reduced Saint-Castin's looted provisions to woeful want, the gear aloft was dropping to shreds, there was not a sound line aboard her save those that held her moored off the black rocks, and the entire stock of powder in the makeshift magazine had been flooded and ruined. Yet, because the ballast of rum was not yet exhausted and the lure of gold was before them, the men were willing enough to face the worst. The one redeeming feature was that in the bleak snow-clad land fronting them there was no enemy.

On the night of their arrival in the cove, Vanderberg summoned all hands aft to a council in the cabin. They listened in silence as he laid the situation bluntly before them—fierce, wolfish faces in the lantern-light, haggard with toil and privation, lustful for unearned gold, branded men and cutthroats and wild beasts in the image of God.

"Without powder," concluded Vanderberg, "we are defenceless. Without food, we are powerless. Without gear and canvas, the ship cannot leave here. Without more men, we could not work her south. Before us there is a waste of snow and icy woods—a white desert. One man among us knows this land; let him speak."

All eyes went to Frontin. He, holding a candle to his pipe, nodded his head coolly.

"Good. From that white desert facing us," he said, "we shall get men, provisions, powder, gear, and a ship. Is that satisfactory?"

Some of the men cursed, others laughed. They liked Frontin for his cool cruelty and his high intelligence.

"If you say so, then it will come to pass," said Bose, growling some blasphemy in his beard. "What about the gold?"

"Unfortunately, I cannot be in two places at once," said Frontin. "I propose that we divide into two parties. I shall remain here with the cap'n and four men, to search out the gold and, if possible, secure it. Seven men and Bose, with Crawford in command, will go into the white desert and bring us men, provisions, munitions, and a ship. Eh?"

There was a roar of laughter at this proposal, which was at once put to the vote and passed, amid a flood of oaths and obscenities. Then Crawford spoke up for the first time.

"The snow is deep. You will provide wings for us to cross?"

Frontin grinned. "I brought Saint-Castin's snowshoes for the purpose. You can use them; the others can learn."

"I can use them," spoke up Bose heavily. "I spent a Winter in Hudson's Bay, with the English company."

"Excellent!" proclaimed Frontin. "Now, Crawford, pay attention and you shall learn how this white desert can be made to furnish all we lack. "That is to say,

provided your scruples against seizing English goods can be overcome."

Crawford shrugged and tamped down his pipe.

"Self-preservation is the answer, my dear Frontin. I am at your service to command."

Frontin once more drew upon the table-top a crude outline of the iron promontory at whose tip they were harboured. He put his finger at a spot on the west coast.

"Here, as I remember the map, is the English settlement of Old Perlican, in a very good harbour. It is about two leagues to the south of us. Opposite it, here on Conception Bay, is another settlement called Bay de Verde. How large these places are I do not know, but they are of some size, and are only a few miles apart. I suggest that you march straight down the coast to Old Perlican, which you can reach to-morrow night."

"Ah!" said Crawford ironically. "Then, without powder, and with eight men at my back, I am to attack this town?"

There was a roar of laughter, which Frontin swiftly quelled.

"Not at all. You are to use those brains of yours, my friend! If you have luck, you will find an English ship at either or both of those places. You will find plenty of sheep, cattle, and dried codfish. A prisoner or two, correctly persuaded, will give you full information. At the worst, you will find numerous fishing-sloops, excellent seaworthy craft, into which you may load supplies."

"And bring the whole coast down upon us?"

"Bah! Spread abroad some lies. No one will ever suspect that we are harboured here."

"Very well," said Crawford. "Get out the snowshoes, Bose, and pick your men. If we have no powder, we need not burden ourselves with fusils—so much the better! If we do not return for a week or so, Vanderberg, you have plenty of supplies for six men. If we do not return at all——"

"But you will return," said Frontin with assurance. "You cannot fail."

"Why so?" asked Crawford curiously.

"Because you follow the Star of Dreams."

While the assembled men stared blankly at this, Crawford met the glittering eyes of Frontin, and in that gaze read an almost superstitious conviction. Somehow, he perceived, the Frenchman had been captivated by his words regarding the emerald star; and smiling at the absurdity of it, he rose and left the assemblage to draw lots for places in the expedition. After all, why not? Perhaps this star, which hung on its thong inside his shirt, and which was a good symbol of his rather vague strivings and longings after a freedom that did not exist, had been sent to him as an omen. His half-jesting utterance had become verity.

"At least," he thought as he looked up at the blazing stars above the black cliffs, "it is possible. Frontin is a man who reverences religion, and he believes it. I do not reverence religion, but I reverence God—and I think I believe it also. Well, we shall see! I accept the omen."

Frowning thoughtfully, he sought his narrow berth.

Morning beheld a laughing, cursing, straggling expedition of nine men starting off along the wooded crest of the cliffs. Crawford led the way, a fusil slung over

his back and one horn with a few charges of good powder at his belt; behind him followed seven men, with Bose bringing up the rear. As was their custom in all things, the buccaneers donned the snowshoes and set forth to sink or swim; and for a while it was a sinking job. They stumbled, tripped, sprawled in the snow and, like the huge children they were, enjoyed the game. The intense cold was invigorating to them; they had food for two days, their leader had enough powder to shoot any game they met, and ahead was the prospect of loot against heavy odds. From the buccaneer viewpoint the situation was ideal—death at their backs, desperation prodding them forward, all to win and nothing to lose. So the winter-stilled woods echoed back lusty shouts of laughter and wild curses and wilder jests, until Crawford issued an order against too much noise.

The advance was not at all rapid. To most of the men these crusted drifts of snow were entirely novel—a thing to be enjoyed as well as fought. By noon, Crawford calculated that no more than a league had been covered, and he called a halt, the men promptly starting a furious snow-fight, hurling cakes of icy consistency.

Crawford beckoned Bose apart and took out his pipe. It was that same white stone pipe girded with silver, which had rested on Saint-Castin's mantel; Vanderberg had looted it, and Crawford won it from him over the dice on the way north.

"Give them a bite to eat and a rest, Bose. By night they'll all be done up with *mal de racquette*. I'm going ahead to scout, so follow my trail. Give the men a tale

of Indians; whether true or not, it will lend them caution and may keep the rogues quiet."

Bose assented and ducked a cake of frozen snow that came hurtling for him. Crawford, turning to the south, was gone among the trees.

"A mad situation!" he thought, as he broke trail. "But like all mad things, it has a grain of sense. If one could only prevent the grain from being overborne by the mass!"

He plunged ahead through the woods, bearing away from the open shore and cliffs, since he knew well that the sole hope of success lay in absolute surprise, and he dared not risk being seen by settlers or hunters. Bose and the men could follow his trail plainly enough, and might come along whenever they were able. Crawford was for the moment glad to be rid of them and unhampered.

No trace of smoke broke the blue sky. After an hour, Crawford knew that somewhere not far ahead must lie Old Perlican, yet he searched for it in vain. No slightest indication of human habitation was to be seen anywhere in this world of white snow, upon which the sunlight broke with dazzling splendour. The trees were bowed beneath their load of snow, and there was something terrible about the deathly stillness, for the frost was not intense and the trees were not cracking. This absolute silence of the wilderness was hard on the nerves of one unused to it; the only sound among the thickly clustering trees was the faint creak and sluff of Crawford's shoes in the crust. Then, with a sudden savagery that brought him to gap-

ing and incredulous halt, a voice lifted out of the dark trees to his left.

"*Sassakouay!*" The gleeful, blood-gloating note thrilled Crawford more than the whoop itself—thrilled him with a sense of frightful things afield.

The Mohawk war whoop—here in this place! It was absurdly out of all reason. Despite his surprise, Crawford knew well enough that his own presence was unsuspected, or that whoop would never have been lifted. He went forward cautiously, working his way over a crest of higher ground among thick pines, and so came abruptly upon a road that lay below him. Biding there in cover, he scrutinized it.

It was a road beaten deeply through the snow, marked with the wheels of carts and the runners of sleds; since it ran from east to west, it must be a road from Bay de Verde to Old Perlican. Yet who had uttered that Mohawk whoop, here in this solitude? That was a thing inexplicable.

Only for a moment, however. Off to the left appeared a moving shape—a man, bare-headed, running clumsily, casting frightened glances over his shoulder, tearing off a heavy coat as he ran. A sobbing cry burst from him, directed apparently at high heaven, since it was impossible that he could imagine any one to be near at hand.

"Help! Help! The red devils are on us—help! Ha' mercy——"

Crawford stiffened in a momentary paralysis of utter amazement. From the trees opposite him, and ahead of the English settler, glided a figure which cut off the flight of the settler. The figure was cloaked in long blanket-

coat and wide beaver hat, but from beneath the brim of the hat peered out hideously painted features grinning at the wretched fugitive.

Here was the source of that Mohawk whoop! Incredible as it was, the thing was true. Crawford saw the redskin deliberately whip out tomahawk and poise for the throw, while the settler, plunging blindly along the road, was ignorant of his doom. Crawford gripped his own axe and, with a swift motion, hurled it—but too late. The other had flung, and even as one blade hit home, the second followed suit. Each man was destroyed by an unseen enemy. Crawford's axe struck through wide hat to brain, and the woods rover plunged forward into the road, without a cry. The hapless fugitive, struck glancingly, but no less fatally, dropped in his tracks and the tomahawks spun in the icy road beyond him.

For a moment Crawford waited, searching the farther trees with keen scrutiny, appalled by what had just happened; that the Mohawk could be raiding this country was beyond belief. No sign of any one else could be descried and, as he looked back to the two figures, came the explanation. The rover's wide hat had fallen away to disclose reddish hair. He was no redskin, but a white man, a Canadian—one of those *voyageurs* and *coureurs-de-bois* who had adopted Indian habits, wives and appearance. This explained the Mohawk cry, for many of that clan had settled above Montreal and took the French part against the English and Iroquois.

The English fugitive lifted his bloody head and came to one knee. Crawford broke from his covert and, discarding the snowshoes, ran to help the man, catching him

in his arms. A glance showed that the wound was mortal, but the dying eyes widened on Crawford.

"Who are ye?"

"A friend," said Crawford, unwonted kindness in his cold eyes. "I tried to get the rogue before he let fly, but failed. Who is he? What does it mean?"

"English, be ye? On guard, on guard!" A flicker of energy filled the fading voice. "I run away from 'em—the devils are sweepin' the coast! It's Iberville himself, they say—Canadians, Injuns! St. John's captured, burned; they've burned Heart's Content, Havre de Grace, all the settlements! Carbonear Island holds out—whence come you that you know not these things?"

"I landed yesterday," said Crawford.

"Then flee with your ship!" cried the dying man. "There is no rescue—all is slaughter! Old Perlican is burned—sloops burned—ship captured—ship from England at Bay de Verde was taken last night—full of provisions—the Irish slaves have risen against us—murder——"

The man's head joggled forward in death.

So there was war in the land! Crawford stood for a little in thought, astounded beyond measure by this news. He had heard of Iberville ere this; that name was both famous and infamous in New England, for it was Iberville who had raided Schenectady with his Mohawk brethren—a gentleman, an officer of the French navy, a wild adventurer who halted for no odds, a Mohawk by adoption. Such was Pierre le Moyne, Sieur d'Iberville.

"So Iberville is ahead of us, eh?" thought Crawford,

and his lips twitched whimsically at the thought. "And he took a ship of provisions last night, at Bay de Verde! And what was that about Irish slaves? Poor devils of Jacobites sent over here and branded! Sink me if all this hasn't a significant hint for my ears! M. d'Iberville, I salute you! Now, my Star of Dreams—lead on!"

Pausing only to retrieve his tomahawk and take the fusil and munitions carried by the dead Canadian, he turned about and hastened on the back trail to rejoin his men.

CHAPTER III

THE IMPORTANCE OF FORGOTTEN THINGS

IN the late afternoon, five men sat about a fire on the hillside north of Bay de Verde. Below them was a scene of destruction; the settlers having broken their parole, Iberville was laying waste the little place. Canadians, hardly to be told from Indians, were driving sheep and cattle to slaughter on the beach; the score of log-houses were being pillaged, and already two of the farther buildings were burning fiercely. The hapless settlers, such of them as had not already escaped to Carbon-ear Island, were being herded into fishing sloops for transportation to Placentia. Lying at anchor offshore was a goodly bark of over sixty tons, just from England; she was laden deep with stores, and by the gleam of her canvas and the scarcely battered paint, was brand new. She was schooner rigged.

The five men who had gathered about their fire, trees closing them in on three sides, had obviously participated in the sack of the place. Portions of a butchered sheep were cooking at the fire. Four of the men, busy replacing filthy rags with looted garments, were shaggy of hair and beard, pinched and starving of countenance, and had something the air of wild beasts as they pawed over heaps of stolen articles.

The fifth man was different. He was prematurely grey, his haggard face was drawn with suffering both

mental and bodily, and in his forehead had been seared an undistinguishable brand. Yet he seemed of a higher intelligence than the others, who treated him with a certain respect; and having changed his rags for good clothes, he was at work with knife and broken mirror, trimming his wild grey beard into some neatness. One presently observed that he seemed different from the others because of an undeniable cleanliness, which the other four obtrusively lacked.

“Victory and blessings!” exclaimed one of the four, staring down at the scene below. “If we had fusils or pikes, and a *garran* to each one of us for riding, and Phelim na Murtha yonder for the leading of us, it would be plague to the Saxon!”

“True for you,” said another, speaking likewise in Irish. “With the knowledge there is with us of this accursed country, and the others of us who are elsewhere, it’s a fine stroke here and there we could lay down! Do we join the Frenchmen, Phelim?”

Thus addressed, the grey-haired man lifted his head and regarded the four. In his eyes one saw that his spirit remained unbroken, though his body might be far spent.

“*Facies ut tua est voluntas*,” he murmured in Latin, then smiled. “Nay, lads! Join them and gain freedom. As for me, I am broken in body and my right leg will never lose its limp, and the hair is grey that should be black, and the forehead branded—nay! I shall get a sword, and go to Carbonear Island and land among the English, and die there after a last stroke at them.”

At this, a voice came out of the trees.

"Well said, Sir Phelim Burke of Murtha!"

The four men sat staring around, dumfounded. But Phelim Burke sprang to his feet, a wild light in his face, his hands all a-tremble.

"Who called me? What voice is that?" he cried out. "I used to know that voice——"

"D'ye remember Boyne Water, and the king who was a coward, Phelim? And who it was called him coward to his face, eh?"

Out from the nearer trees strode Crawford, laughing a little as he gazed on the five of them. Now Sir Phelim uttered a great cry.

"Harry Crawford—is it mad I am, or a ghost?"

"Try this," and Crawford, leaving his snowshoes, came over the trampled snow with hand extended.

The two men gripped.

"Gad, Phelim, what a meeting is this! All friends here, eh? This is good enough. Tell 'em to down knives before they smite me."

Phelim Burke excitedly addressed the four, who were closing in on Crawford, and they sheepishly relaxed.

"Harry, Harry, this is like a dream!" cried Sir Phelim, tears standing in his eyes. "Two years we've been slaves in this land, wild beasts of burden—art with Iberville?"

"Devil a bit," and Crawford laughed. "Nor, as I gathered from your speech—though I've forgotten the Gaelic in large part—are you. I've a pirate craft hidden up the coast. Will you and these men join me, Phelim?"

"Ay, to hell and back!" said Sir Phelim promptly. "I'll answer for them. But I'm a broken man——"

"Don't be a fool," snapped Crawford. "Listen, now!

We've small time for talk, since the afternoon is wasting. Is Iberville himself down yonder?"

"Ay, and forty devils of Canadians."

"They are burning the place—there's smoke from another house." Crawford's gaze swept the little harbour. "D'ye know when they are leaving?"

"Not until morning."

"Excellent! I need men, Phelim. Five of you here—can we get any more near by?"

Sir Phelim questioned his four. These, all of them Sea Burkes out of Galway and veterans of the Irish wars who had been taken prisoner and shipped to Newfoundland as slaves, were eager enough to follow Crawford, the more as he was an old friend and companion in arms of Sir Phelim, whom they loved. They said that a number of Irish were roving the woods, and several were thought to be at Old Perlican, to which place a detachment of Canadians had departed, with intent to give it a like fate with that of Bay de Verde.

Crawford whistled, and in came Bose from his concealment among the trees.

"Here are five of our fresh men, Bose, and down yonder the ship awaiting us. Go back to where the men are camped, set out a guard or two against roving Canadians, and after dark bring them on to this spot. Off with you! Now, Phelim, would it be possible for two of your men to cover the six miles to Old Perlican, rouse up any of their comrades whom they may find, and be back here before dawn?"

At this, Phelim Burke laughed as he had not laughed for many a month.

"Lad, these Irish can outrun horses! And with freedom awaiting them, what can they not do? They'll be back an hour past midnight, I promise you. One to Old Perlican, the other three to roam the woods. Iberville has released us all and offered us refuge in Canada, but we'll ship with you."

The four Irish, waiting only to catch up their half-cooked meat from the fire and bear it off to eat as they went, departed hastily. Left alone, Crawford and Sir Phelim settled down by the fire to bring old friendship up to date.

Phelim Burke na Murtha had seen hard fate—his family was wiped out, he himself had been racked and tortured, and the two years here in Newfoundland in bestial slavery to masters who knew no pity had all but finished him; yet the spirit burned strong within him. He nodded soberly to Crawford's almost defiant declaration of freedom.

"Ay, Harry, I'm with you. The world's burned out for me, and I've no heart for the vain mockery that once we loved. Throw all the stars into the bowl of night and pluck one out, and follow it; then, lad, if you'll be burdened with a broken Irisher who seats mad whims higher at table than sense——"

Suddenly Crawford, putting a hand under his shirt, held before Burke's amazed eyes the emerald jewel.

"Here's your star, Phelim—Star of Dreams it's named, and I'll live or die by it!"

He started up, pointed to the cove below.

"Look, man, look! There go more houses to the flames.

You're certain Iberville will stay here the night? Then why send the buildings roaring?"

"He'll stay, for he has to await the party back from Old Perlican. As for houses, it's little those wild Canadians care for roofs over their heads, lad! Faith, ye should ha' seen Iberville and his men sweep over that English bark at daybreak, against cannon and musketry! It's fighters they are, lad. Beside them the French are fools."

As the sunset drew on, Crawford heard how Iberville and his six-score Canadian rovers had wiped the Newfoundland settlements out of existence, yet doing it with no needless slaughter. They had come overland from Placentia in the dead of Winter and struck the east coasts like a thunderbolt, nor could the scattered settlements resist them, though there were some hundreds of hunters to swell the ranks of the settlers. The impregnable island of Carbonear alone held them at bay, while those who escaped had fled to Bonavista in the north, which Iberville would attack ere the snows melted.

Crawford in turn told Sir Phelim his own story, and that of the Star of Dreams, and the darkness came upon them while they talked, with the burned houses below glowing as red patches against the star-glistening snow.

"If we can carry off that bark," said Sir Phelim, a new ring to his voice, "then I'll ha' faith in your Star of Dreams, Harry! She's loaded to the gunnel with supplies of all kinds, carries three twelve-pounders and as many culverins, and Iberville has put aboard her a good share of the new-killed meat and the captured cod. What a

prize she'd be for destitute men! But they'll have a guard aboard her, and how could we reach her?"

"That's to find out," said Crawford. "They'll not suspect you, Phelim—could ye not find out their dispositions, and where the boats lie on the shore?"

Sir Phelim nodded and rose. He departed limping, by reason of a broken leg that had knit poorly, and Crawford stared after his vanished figure with sorrowing gaze.

"Devil take all kings!" he muttered. "There goes a better man than any of the Stuart breed he has fought for—yet at forty Phelim Burke is an old man of seventy! And down yonder honest settlers are driven forth and good Canadians are risking life and limb—murder is done and steel cleaving flesh—for what? For the pride of besotted fools who wear gilt crowns. I'll fight, sink me if I don't, but it'll be for my own hand, for my own life, for my own free pleasure. Ay, my Star of Dreams, lead the way! We'll go over the horizon together."

He built the fire up afresh, careless whether it were seen by the French below, and, taking out his pipe, smoked in thoughtful reflection. In throwing off all shackles of allegiance, in declaring his quest of freedom, he knew well that he made of himself nothing better than an outlaw; he had no intention, however, of stalking up and down the haunts of men and vaunting himself. He cared nothing for the eyes of other men—he was questing that which would answer to the inner man alone.

One thing he forgot—that every act committed in this world, whether for good or ill, brings a certain reckoning in its train. And now there was upon him the reckoning of an act which he had already forgotten.

The night was warm, the snow-crust was melting, and though the stars were out there was rain in the air. Crawford, as he sat before the crackling fire, heard no sound whatever until a voice sounded at his very elbow in French.

"Do not move, *monsieur*! My brother wishes to ask you a question."

Crawford glanced around, could see nothing, but caught the click of a pistol at cock. Without sign of his surprise, he took the pipe from his lips and laughed shortly.

"Greetings, *mon ami*! You have somewhat the advantage of me. Since I am prejudiced against speaking with unseen friends, may I suggest that you advance without fear?"

A somewhat boyish laugh sounded softly, but it died out into ominous words.

"Your pardon, *monsieur*! This is an affair in which I have no share, save that of curiosity—and compellance. My brother Pierre-Jean Beovilh, the great war-chief of the Abnakis, desires to ask you a question."

While these words sounded at the elbow of Crawford, a man stepped into the circle of firelight opposite him and came to a halt. Crawford gazed curiously at the visitor, not betraying the dismay which seized upon him; he saw a tall Indian, who had flung aside his garments and stood naked to the waist, painted and feathered, the features repulsively ugly and ferocious. As he stared at the Abnaki, the latter spoke to him curtly and without any of the usual preliminaries, in very good French.

"Who are you, who hold in your hand the sacred calu-

met of the Abnaki, which has a home in the lodge of my brother Saint-Castin at Pentagoet?"

And Crawford realized that the stone pipe in his hand was one which had been taken from the mantel of Saint-Castin, where pipes had stood racked.

Inspecting the war-chief, at whose belt hung fresh scalps, Crawford took his time about responding. Suddenly piecing together what he had previously learned and what Phelim Burke had been telling him, he comprehended his acute peril.

This Pierre-Jean Beovilh had come from Acadia to join Iberville's raiders, was the highest Abnaki chief, and belonged to the now destroyed clan of the Caniba. Saint-Castin, by his marriage to a red princess and his unsanctioned union with many other ladies of colour, had constituted himself a sort of vicar-general to the Abnakis. It was highly probable that the sacred relics of the Caniba clan had been deposited with him for safe-keeping, and that this white stone calumet was one such relic, profaned by Crawford's usage.

Now, knowing himself trapped, Crawford took the one open trail—that of audacity. He must know with whom he dealt, for the greatest danger was that the whole Canadian force would be brought upon him. One shot, one yell, would bring them.

"In the *cabanes* of the Mohawk clan of the Iroquois I am known as The Eagle," he said calmly. There was truth in this, though he had never visited the elm-bark lodges of his Mohawk friends. "The Eagle does not talk with cowards who fear to show themselves. Let my red brother call his French friend out into the light."

At the Mohawk name, the Abnaki chief started slightly. Then, answering Crawford's challenge, another figure stepped from the shadows, pistol cocked. Crawford was astonished, first to perceive that it was a boy of sixteen, and second, by the aspect of this boy. He was handsome as an Apollo, long brown curls framing his perfect features and despite his youth there was a certain air of dignity and command in his countenance. His eyes glinted hard at Crawford as he spoke in French, using the red-skin phraseology.

"My white brother has a Mohawk name, but he is not a Mohawk; he speaks with the French tongue, but he is no Frenchman. Let him speak. I am Le Moyne de Bienville."

Bienville—brother to Iberville! Crawford could not repress his astonishment as he regarded this boy of sixteen, accompanying veteran wood-rovers on a raid so perilous and even desperate. And reading the look, Bienville's boyish pride instantly resented it.

"Speak!" he snapped angrily. "Is The Eagle a woman, that he fears to speak to warriors?"

The Abnaki chief, hand on knife, watched Crawford with unwinking gaze.

"The Eagle looks at the sun and does not blink," and Crawford's rare smile leaped out, so that the boy's anger vanished instantly under the implied compliment. "But The Eagle has been asked a question by this snapping cur. The Eagle did not know that the Abnakis had a war-chief; he thought they were women, whom the French Mohawks protected from the wrath of the Iroquois nation. Now let this Caniba dog, whose clan is only a memory

among the Abnaki nation, gaze upon this coat which The Eagle wears. Let his eyes rest upon these moccasins. He has often been in the lodge of Saint-Castin; perhaps he will recognize them."

The Abnaki, whose coppery breast was heaving with rage at these words, spat reply.

"They belong to my brother Saint-Castin."

At this, Bienville started slightly and watched Crawford in astonished speculation. The latter puffed again at his pipe, then spoke quietly, deliberately.

"Then let the Abnaki dog go and ask Saint-Castin for an explanation. Or, since he is a woman and a snapping cur at French heels, let him summon his Canadian friends to make The Eagle a prisoner."

Now the fury of the war-chief burst all bounds.

"The war-chief of the Abnakis does not need Canadians to help him lift the scalp of a thieving Englishman, who calls himself by a Mohawk name and speaks the French tongue!"

Bienville, perhaps comprehending Crawford's purpose, attempted to interpose, but the furious chief turned upon him with a flat demand that he keep silent.

"This English thief has insulted me and holds in his hand the sacred calumet. This is not a matter for Canadians. His scalp is mine, and I claim it!"

Then, whirling upon Crawford, the chief whipped out a knife.

"Give me your scalp, English thief! It is mine."

Now Bienville stood silent and perplexed, not knowing who Crawford might be, and astounded at his having come recently from Pentagoet; he could place Crawford

for neither friend nor enemy. And Crawford, knowing that he must prevent any summons to the Canadians, took instant advantage of the boy's perplexity.

"Keep out of it, Bienville," he said rapidly, as he rose to his feet. "I have a message for Iberville which is imperative." Then he looked at the Abnaki chief and smiled frostily. "Your *manitou* has deserted you," he said, using the word *esprit* which translated the Indian term. "At the name of the Iroquois your *manitou* trembles and is afraid. That is a woman's scalp at your belt, Caniba dog. Look, how your *manitou* causes it to shake and quiver with fright!"

For an instant the fury-red gaze of the chief dropped to the silky scalp at his waist—and in that instant Crawford was upon him. But his moccasins slipped in the soft snow around the fire; the blow failed, and Crawford, unable to regain balance, fell headlong.

Like a snake uncoiling in stroke, the Abnaki leaped.

Crawford twisted on his side in the snow, by a miracle of dexterity evading the knife-blow, but he could not evade the crushing weight of the redskin, which pinned him down. He drove up blindly and desperately with his own knife. The blade slid home in flesh, then the haft was jerked from his hand as the Abnaki writhed up, only slightly hurt.

For an instant Crawford, helpless to move, knew himself lost. The chief was kneeling upon him, knife flashing up for the finishing stroke; with a grunt, the redskin brought it down for Crawford's breast. The blow went true—but the point swerved, turned sharply aside, glanced from Crawford's ribs into the ground.

The Star of Dreams had intervened.

"My *manitou* is strong," panted Crawford, and threw out his strength.

Astonished and dismayed by the happening, disconcerted by those words, the Abnaki was caught in relaxation. He swung sidewise, then Crawford had him by knife-arm and throat and dragged him down in deadly embrace.

Through the snow they plunged, bodies interlocked in a desperate grip, rolling over and over, while to one side watched the eager-faced Bienville, lowered pistol forgotten. Crawford knew himself the better man at this game, feeling the throat-tendons of the redskin yield to his iron fingers; but at the same time he felt the chief's left hand leave his arm and go down for the tomahawk at girdle. Then, the heat of the fire close at hand, he hurled himself sidelong, dragged the Indian over him, thrust that hideously painted head and torso into the flames and embers of the blaze.

War-chief or not, a low cry of mortal anguish escaped the Abnaki, and his arms flew out. Crawford, rising to his knees, drove a fist into the painted visage, then struck once more, this time more carefully. The Abnaki relaxed, senseless, and Crawford dragged his inert body back from the fire.

"A stout rascal, egad!" he exclaimed, panting for breath. "I should put the steel into him—but, unhappily, I have convictions against murder, and I cannot conceive of any immediate use to which I might put his scalp lock. You may have his life, Bienville; I imagine that it is of some value to you and your brother. By the way, the priming has fallen out of that pistol. Better look to it."

Bienville, wide-eyed at the scene, glanced at his pistol, laughed, and thrust it into his girdle. He stared at Crawford in mingled admiration and perplexity.

"You are an Englishman, yet no enemy? You have come from Saint-Castin? What did you say about a message?"

Crawford chuckled.

"Ay, for Iberville. Your pardon, *monsieur*, one moment——"

As he stood, he had discerned a figure hovering outside the firelight, and knew it for that of Phelim Burke. He beckoned, his mind racing furiously as he stood there; could he handle Bienville aright, everything was won—otherwise all was lost.

"Come along, Phelim, and put up the knife," he said, laughing. "Sieur de Bienville, I think you have seen Sir Phelim Burke before, since your force freed him from bondage."

Phelim limped forward.

"Shall I dirk the lad?" he asked in Irish, though anxiously.

"No," said Crawford, while Bienville, divided between startled alarm and perplexity, stared again. "Go and bring up my men, quickly! They must be close by. Bring them quietly."

Sir Phelim, ready to use his knife if need were, yet relieved that it was not demanded, went limping off into the darkness. Bienville suddenly turned on Crawford with a curt demand.

"Who in the name of the saints are you, *monsieur*? An Irishman, by your words with that poor fellow. If you

have a message for my brother, why have you not delivered it to him instead of sitting here on the hillside?"

"All in good time," and Crawford, with a whimsical laugh, waved his hand. "Will you accept a seat at my fire? I want to finish my smoke, and must keep an eye on this red rascal lest he come awake and knife me unexpectedly."

"I have not thanked you for your mercy to him," said Bienville, reluctantly seating himself. "It was well done, *monsieur*. I should have been sorry to pistol you had you slain him, for he is a great man among the Abnakis. By what miracle did you escape his knife? I saw the blow fall full——"

Crawford filled and lighted his pipe with a brand, then put a hand to his shirt and through the gaping rent showed the glittering Star of Dreams, now marked with a dent in the soft virgin gold, and Bienville exclaimed at the smear of blood.

"It's nothing—a scrape of the skin," said Crawford lightly. He was fighting for time now, knowing well that he had a young lion to deal with if he made one false move. "It was a stroke of ill-luck that made your Abnaki recognize that pipe. I helped myself from Saint-Castin's mantel rack, never dreaming that one pipe was more than another."

Bienville laughed boyishly.

"I should have liked to hear Saint-Castin curse when he discovered which one you had taken! Then you have come by way of Placentia, eh? Heard you anything of the fleet from France? My brother Serigny was to bring a fleet which the king promised to give Pierre——"

Crawford remembered the French sail of the line they had raised off the Banks.

"The ships are at Placentia now," he said, "though my message does not deal with them. But your pardon, *mon-sieur*. My name is Crawford, and I was formerly an officer of his Majesty of St. Germain's. At present I am following my star of destiny. The Irish gentleman whom you just now beheld is an old friend——"

At this instant the Abnaki chief uttered a low groan and moved slightly. Crawford swiftly turned, picked up some of the rags that the Irish had discarded, and with these he knelt above the chief, binding the latter firmly and gagging him to boot. A crunch of snow caused him to look up—and he saw a tall figure come into the circle of light.

"Ten thousand devils!" exclaimed a rich, vibrant voice. "What's this, Bienville? You and the chief flitting off after dark—who is this man?"

Crawford rose, and his heart sank. What a scurvy trick of fate, when all was in his hands so neatly! For, though the newcomer was garbed as any other woods-loper, Crawford did not need to be told that he was facing Pierre le Moyne, Sieur d'Iberville.

"This, my brother," said Bienville hastily, "is the Sieur Crawford. He has come from Pentagoet with a message from Saint-Castin. The war-chief quarrelled with him, and he bested the chief in fair fight and spared his life."

Crawford scarce listened, for he was staring at Iberville, yet seeking past the latter with every sense acutely strained. Incredible as it seemed, there was no one else; Iberville had come alone, perhaps to discover what Bien-

ville and the Abnaki were doing at this hillside blaze. For Iberville, having lost more than one brother at his very side in border raids, cherished most tenderly this youngest scion of the Le Moynes stock.

Energy radiated from the man who stood surveying Crawford. Those masterful eyes, so wide-set in his head, those delicate lines of brow and nostril and lip, that great jutting beak of a nose, long upper lip, heavy oval jaw—all of these spelled the man within, impatient of restraint, reckless of obstacles, daring heaven or hell on a cast of the dice. No half-way man was Iberville, and showed it.

"And the fleet's at Placentia!" broke out Bienville suddenly. "Serigny has come!"

Now Iberville started, and a sudden flash gleamed in his eyes.

"Ha! You have letters for me? Orders? Word from Placentia?"

"No," said Crawford. "I chanced to see the fleet on my way here, that is all. I did not stop at Placentia, for reasons which were excellent at the time——"

But Iberville had lifted his head, his eyes darting to the trees around. Least of all men to be caught napping was this veteran of many a warpath, from Hudson Bay to Albany. His hand snatched at the tomahawk in his girdle.

"Men around us!" he snapped. "Back, Bienville——"

"My men," said Crawford, and drew a great breath of relief. Then he laughed lightly. "And if they are not half-dead with snowshoe sickness, sink me!"

He lifted his voice.

"Ho, there! Sir Phelim? Bose? Come along to the fire and have a care what you do."

"Ay," rejoined the heavy tones of Bose, from among the nearer trees. "But these snowshoes be killin' the rogues—groan all ye want now, ye dogs!"

The sound of muffled curses and groans that followed his words brought a laugh to Crawford's lips, and even Iberville's wide mouth twitched in a grim smile. Crawford now played his luck hard; by some miracle the game was all in his hands for the winning, and it was time for the final cast of dice which must win or lose. And, as he perceived in a flash, he must stake all on such a cast as would be thrown only by a fool, a madman—or a gentleman. Abandon Sir Phelim's Irishmen he could not, yet they would not arrive until past midnight at earliest. He must dare Iberville, man to man, soul to soul, and his one desperate hope of success was to evoke from the man's spirit its qualities of reckless abandon and high nobility—and trust to them.

Knocking out his pipe and pouching it, Crawford stepped around the fire to Iberville, and spoke in a low voice. "I have a message for your ears alone. Above all, it must not reach Bienville. Will you step aside with me, so that we may speak in private?"

Iberville flashed a glance at the boy, another glance at the surrounding trees. From these, the hulking figure of Bose was appearing. Crawford turned with a curt order.

"Keep your men around the fire. Make no noise. Leave me to speak in peace with this gentleman."

"Ay," said Bose, and stooped to get free of his snowshoes.

"I am at your service, *monsieur*," said Iberville quietly. "Come a few paces down the hillside."

There was a peculiar timbre in his voice. By some instinctive leap of the mind, Crawford knew instantly that Iberville had comprehended everything.

"Careful!" he said. "Hear me out first, for the sake of the boy."

Iberville flashed him an astonished glance. They halted, a dozen paces from the fire, around which the men were now gathering.

"Eh? For the love of the saints, do you read a man's mind?"

"Desperation, my dear Iberville, breeds miracles, as you should know." Crawford spoke lightly, swiftly, for desperation was indeed driving him. "It is true that I have just come from Pentagoet, where I had the pleasure of looting the establishment of Baron de Saint-Castin. Bienville was a trifle hasty in jumping at conclusions, for the message that I bring you is from—myself. I am, by force of necessity, compelled to act the part of a pirate. Those men of mine, and others awaiting me on the coast, are destitute. Now, in this harbour below us there is an excellent ship, heavily laden with all things; and I'm going to have that ship. I think it is in your mind to tomahawk me, rescue your brother from a situation which might prove embarrassing to him, and summon your Canadians. But, I beg of you, postpone this action until you hear me out. To tell the truth, I've had a devil of a wrestling match with your Abnaki chief, and I'm still a trifle short of breath."

Iberville burst into a laugh, compounded of anger and amusement. "My faith, *monsieur!* I believe that you're a madman."

"I might agree with you," said Crawford whimsically, "and that would prove me sane! As it happens, Iberville, I have no quarrel with you or with Frenchmen. Indeed, several of my men yonder are from French Hispaniola. Nor have I any intention of pirating French commerce. The plain facts of the case are that you got ahead of me by a few hours, in capturing yonder bark, and now I must insist that you hand her over to me."

"I am not in the habit of yielding up what I have seized," said Iberville coldly.

"Precisely. Therefore, I would point out to you that the situation offers a most interesting opportunity of giving a *quid pro quo*. First consider, my dear Iberville, that habits are things which none of us like to break, but which all of us must sometime break unless they are to master us."

Iberville chuckled at that, and Crawford continued swiftly.

"Then consider, I pray you: Item, I am not in the habit of murdering prisoners, or of shooting down boys. Item, those buccaneers who obey me are in the habit of doing both things. You perceive the obvious exchange? If you break your habit of keeping what you have seized, those pirates of mine will then break their habit of murdering; that is to say, if you turn over the bark to me, the Abnaki chief and Bienville go free. But if you refuse to break this habit of yours, then I am unhappily compelled to break my own habit—in effect, to kill the Abnaki and also your brother. The chief's blood would not trouble my conscience in the least, while I know that you would go to great lengths to avoid his death, as a matter of policy

toward your Indian allies; yet I confess that I would kill Bienville with the greatest of reluctance."

"Why, you cursed philosopher-pirate, you couldn't touch him!" exclaimed Iberville, laughing amusedly. "Devil take you, come and join me! I like you, Monsieur Crawford. You shall have a royal commission under me, and I'll grant amnesty to your pirates and free transportation to Boston or where they will. Eh?"

The offer was sincere and cordial, and Crawford regretfully shook his head.

"My dear Iberville, I have sworn to give no more allegiance to kings. I am going into the wilderness to seek freedom—north or west, as may be. The old ways of life are as an empty sheath, from which I have drawn the sword; and I go forward with the naked blade. I serve myself, I acknowledge no master, I seek no man's gold—but there! You'll be calling me a madman again."

"A madman? No." Iberville swept him with a keen glance, as they stood under the starlight. "My faith, man! Sometimes I myself am tempted—but never mind. *Vive le roi!* You've tasted freedom and I can't blame you, though I'm sorry you'll not accept my offer."

Iberville paused an instant. "Did you ever hear of the Star Woman?" he asked abruptly.

"No." Crawford was astonished by the question. "Who is she?"

"A fit subject for your investigations—beyond the horizon." A short laugh came from the other man, yet there was a lingering regret in his tone. "Perrot once told me about her; you know of Sieur Perrot the explorer, of course. A queen among the far western Indians, a

great enchantress, a female *jongleur*. One of the Cree chiefs let slip something about her two years ago, when I was at the bay. Well, well, there is no time to talk of dreams! Come—what's your exact proposal to me, monsieur?"

Crawford dismissed the name of the Star Woman, though it had struck his fancy. Some Indian legend, beyond question.

"My terms are fairly obvious," he returned coolly. "I'm as good a man as you with the knife or tomahawk, so you'd not down me and get away with ease. Bienville is surrounded, yonder, and the Abnaki is bound. Now, you'll not favour me to save your own skin, but you'll do it to save the two over there. The bark is not worth so much to Canada as are those two lives."

"At a call from me," said Iberville reflectively, "my Canadians would put you all to the stake."

"Undoubtedly, but you would be in no position to enjoy the spectacle, I assure you!"

"True. Yet I am rather warm in the notion of taking that bark and her cargo into Placentia."

"And, my dear Iberville, I am most devilish warm in the necessity of having her myself. Egad, man! Do you want me to go down to Carbonear Island and head these English against you? They have no officers, no leaders, and are helpless, but if I undertake to lead them, I'll guarantee to cut you off from Placentia——"

Iberville broke into a laugh and clapped him on the shoulder.

"Monsieur Crawford, Satan take me if you're not a man after my own heart! You shall have the bark. My

word upon it. Call your men and I'll give you boats to get aboard."

"I can't do it, Iberville. I've promised to wait here until after midnight for some of the escaped Irish slaves who are coming to join me."

"What?" exclaimed Iberville. "Faith, you can't expect to keep the three of us prisoners here until after midnight, without my *voyageurs* hacking at the hinges of hell to find us! Unless, of course, you propose to use us as hostages——"

"Not in the least," said Crawford quickly. "It will give me great pleasure if you'll take that Abnaki devil with you and keep him quiet until we get off. Bienville, of course, will know nothing of the entire matter; it remains between the two of us alone. If you will see to it that your men are off the bark, and that your Canadians do not interfere with us, we shall come down to the beach as soon as my Irish arrive, go aboard, and sail away. As you will perceive, it is all very simple."

Iberville stared at him for a moment.

"Satan fly away with me! Are you in earnest?"

"Eh? Why, of course! Do you find the proposal disagreeable?"

A short laugh broke from the Canadian.

"What assurance have you that I'll not lay an ambush at the shore and cut you off to the last man?"

"Every assurance in the world."

"What, then?"

"The fact that you are Iberville."

The other was silent a moment, then spoke softly.

"Monsieur Crawford, I offer you my most respectful homage. Shall we rejoin my brother?"

They turned back together to the fire. There Bienville was laughing heartily and exchanging jests with the buccaneers who, weary and cursing the snowshoes that had left them almost unable to hobble, were rubbing sore tendons. The Abnaki chief, conscious, was glaring up at Sir Phelim Burke, who was seated grimly beside him.

Crawford strode forward and cut the chief loose, and at a few words in Algonquin from Iberville, he stalked off into the darkness. Crawford checked his men with a gesture.

"Come, Bienville," said the tall Canadian, and swept off his hat. "Monsieur Crawford, I salute you. To our next meeting!"

The two figures disappeared. Sir Phelim stared after them, then lifted wondering eyes to Crawford.

"*Hanam-an-diaoul!* Is it a wizard ye are, Harry? What's happened, lad? What's happened, that ye let those three go——"

"Nothing's happened, Phelim, except that the Star of Dreams is shining fair for us," said Crawford.

Yet he sighed a little as he turned to tell the men of the ship that lay awaiting them, and in his heart there was a wish that some day he might again meet that tall Canadian, for he felt strangely drawn to the man.

Perhaps, for all his boasted quest of freedom, that offer of a commission under Iberville had been a sore temptation. And the name of the Star Woman lingered strangely in his memory.

CHAPTER IV

ONE GAINS GOLD, ANOTHER A FRIEND

IN the meanwhile, during three days the men left aboard the *Irondelle* slaved, as Vanderberg put it, like dogs of Holland, yet never was slavery more richly rewarded.

Frontin's hawk-nose led them aright, but not his calculations, for so toilsome was the road along the shore-ice under the cliffs, that in the end Vanderberg rigged shears up above and rove his unrotted mooring-lines together, and so made an easy descent and a quick road over the snow above the cliffs. This let the *Irondelle* pursue her own fate, and a current threw her ashore when the remaining bower-hawser chafed through and she lay stranded on a shallow.

Who cared? They were mad, those men, doing the work of giants for the reward of the earth-gnomes. On the ledge under the cliff, the ledge which was flooded at high tide, or had been, were great masses of snow-clear ice like crystal, and under the ice lay the shattered and sundered galleon, and chests plain to be seen. Then there was chopping and splitting of ice, and Frontin dried out the wet powder and tampered with it, and made some of it to burn so that the ice was riven asunder.

Because the days were short, they hurled dead trees and logs over the cliff-edge, and built them fires on the ledge, laboring through the night. When wearied, they

dropped and slept, and rose and took up axe and chisel again, now snatching a bite to eat and now a dram of hot rum, staggering as they hewed; and the smoke of the burning rose up by day and the flame seared the cliff-side by night. In three days those six men accomplished what any other twelve men would have done in a fortnight, so that in the end they reached the shattered galleon.

On the fourth day came to pass the prodigious finale. The plunder was got at and laid out—six chests of mahogany bound with sea-greened brass, three baggy canvas sacks bulging with gold cups and like articles, and two casks of good Spanish wine. Frontin and the four men were swung up to the cliff-top to haul, while Vanderberg remained below to make each chest fast in turn. A hard driving rain had been falling all night, and Vanderberg had laid fire to the high carven stern-portion of the galleon's wreck, so that presently the ledge and the niche in the cliffs were roaring warm, and the work went on merrily. One by one the chests swung up, and the bags, and one of the casks of wine. Then, as Vanderberg was making fast the second cask, the fire reached some unsuspected powder in the wreck.

Those up above knew not what had happened, nor cared greatly, for the rain was driving down and they had broached the cask of wine and were hammering at one of the mahogany chests for a sight of the gold. Then, when the shock of the explosion was gone, and the roaring echoes had died out, they heard Vanderberg bawling at them and saw the rope shaking; so Frontin flailed them to the lines, and presently the captain was hauled up and landed like a sack of meal.

All fell to laughing at him, for he was spitting oaths and curses like any cat; the clothes were stripped from him, half the great beard was flamed away, and a brand had smitten him across the face, blackening him and bringing the claret from his nostrils in a stream.

"The day of miracles isn't passed yet," cackled Frontin. "Faith, we left you a Dutchman and up you come a black Guinea-man!"

"Give me your breeches, damn you," roared Vanderberg, who was furious.

"Go to the devil," said Frontin, and turned to draw a cup of wine, but Vanderberg struck him from one side and sent him senseless into the snow.

Now Vanderberg stripped one of the men, donned the wet clothes, and sent the fellow running naked in his boots through the rain and snow for the *Irondelle*. Then, repenting the blow and perhaps a little afraid, he roused Frontin to life and held wine to his lips.

"Fiend take me, it was a foul blow," said he.

Frontin gulped the wine, staggered up, and felt his jaw. He gave the captain one look from his glittering eyes, then shrugged.

"It's nothing," he said lightly, while the men gaped, expecting a fight. "Come, to work! We must get these chests and bags to the cove."

So that matter passed over, for the moment, though more than likely it drew certain results in train.

Frontin showed them how to make a *travois* of poles, on which the chests might be dragged by two men. The first was loaded with a chest and sent off, and a second was made and sent off likewise, Frontin and the fourth

man dragging it, while Vanderberg followed with one of the bags of small loot pulling from his wide shoulders.

When they neared the cove, the man who had gone to clothe himself now came running, with word that the tide was high and the ketch was floated from the shoal. Sure enough, they sighted the *Irondelle* on an even keel and drifting with the currents toward an inner ledge of rocks, though there was a drift of wind and rain offshore. Now, with the gold safely garnered, wakened thoughts of safety, and there was a wild race down to the cove. Tumbling into the boat, they rowed to the ketch and fell to work; she was a sorry thing enough, but better than naught, and there was no time to lose, the tide being at flood.

While Vanderberg fell to work with the hawser-lines they had brought back, bending them to the larboard bower, Frontin and another man got a butt sawed asunder and slung, while the other three loosed the fore-top-sail, eased the buntlines, braced the yard and hauled home the sheets and sent the rotten, mended canvas up to catch the higher drift of wind. Leaving Vanderberg and another to brace up as required, Frontin and the three remaining men tumbled into the boat, took out a coil of the old feeble rope, spanned the boat from stem to stern, and set out the butts. The captain and his one man hauled in, the boat hung athwart, and with the dragging butts counteracted the pull of the current. So the ketch got a start, and the upper breeze caught her topsail, and she drew away from the rocky ledge. In two minutes she was moored again by one hawser and safe enough.

Then, with a pint stoup of raw rum all around, it was back to the shore again and all hands for the gold. By

the time the six chests and the bags and what was left of the Spanish wine was got down to the cove, the six of them were reeling and staggering with maudlin weariness, and the afternoon half-gone. To get the gold aboard ship and finish their task, however, remained; and Vanderberg drove them at it. Racked and rain-soaked, weary to death, swigging more rum and cursing the gold and the rain, they made shift to row out the boat again and again, until at last the burden was on deck. Then there was a flicker of life as a chest was hammered open, and gold gleamed in little heavy bars all stamped with the Spanish seal; after this they dropped below like dead men and lay huddled in any shelter they could find, and slept.

Sometime toward morning Vanderberg awakened with cold; the rain had ceased and frost was come again with a clear sky. He got lanterns lighted and a fire going in the galley, and with the dawn all hands were about, the last of the food was set forth, and the click-clack of the pumps was heard. One of the blackamoors went down for more rum, but he came out of the hold with his face all grey.

"The devil has got us now!" he shouted out. "She's all under water, and a butt started, and the seams opened by the pounding."

"Then let her sink and be damned," said Vanderberg, with a storm of oaths. "We're in three fathoms and can't hurt."

By sunrise, indeed, she was settled on bottom, with the side down; but an hour after this there was a shout from the cook on deck. The others were below, eating like

starved men, and poured up to see two craft standing in around the headland for the cove.

"English!" said Frontin coolly. "A bark and a ketch, and either of them could master us——"

Oaths stormed and curses rang, for there was no powder and the guns were useless. Some wanted to flee ashore with the gold, but Vanderberg, his half-beard floating in the wind, cursed them into silence and ordered the guns unstopped and run out.

"Little they know we can't bite!" said he. While they were at this, however, and the two English ships running into the cove, Frontin fell suddenly to laughing and pointed to a man in the bows of the bark, which was the nearer craft.

"There's Bose—ha! Crawford has brought us the ships and men."

Oaths and sour curses changed to yells of mad delight, which were answered from the two ships; and these ran down and anchored a cable-length away. A boat put off from the ketch, with Crawford in her, and picked up Bose from the bark. When Vanderberg saw all his old men coming in the boat, and other men still aboard the bark, he swore with mad joy that Crawford should have an extra share of the gold, to which the other men joined their vote. But Frontin stood to one side, his glittering eyes hard and cold, and a saturnine smile just touching his thin lips.

Crawford came over the rail, Bose and the men poured aboard, and there was pandemonium for a while, stories bawled forth, chests and gold to be stared at, rum to be

swigged. Crawford looked at the loot and turned away with a cool shrug, exchanged a glance with Frontin, and found Vanderberg tugging at his sleeve and squinting at the two craft.

"What men are those? Where did ye find 'em? The ketch is a prize," he said.

"Ay, a Bostonnais—a fur pirate, blown out of her course by storm. When her cap'n and officers were pistoled, she gave in," said Crawford. "Eleven men left alive aboard her who are glad enough to go pirating under Vanderberg or Crawford. On the bark I have eight Irishmen who care naught for Vanderberg but much for Crawford."

"Damme and sink me!" roared Vanderberg delightedly, and smote him between the shoulders. "Come down to the cabin and talk in peace."

They went below and settled about the table, leaving the eager men to smash the mahogany chests with axes. Frontin brought what was left of the Spanish wine, and a rare old drink it was; Crawford made his own tale brief, and listened to Vanderberg's tale, and presently Bose came down to hear, fists full of gold and a wide grin on his face. The other men drifted down by ones and twos, until they were all crowded into the cabin and some with gold bars, others with coin found in one of the chests.

Crawford sipped at the Spanish wine but refused to drink heavily. In his manner was a certain constraint, a cold and imperturbable air of waiting; as he listened to Vanderberg's ranting about roaming the Indies with his squadron and mayhap taking aboard more men and sacking some Spanish town on the main, a smile tugged at his

lips and his blue eyes glinted frostily. Presently this mien of his impinged upon Vanderberg's perception, so that the captain turned to him with an oath.

"What's in you, Crawford? Hast no warmth in life? Come, down with the wine and we'll go aboard the bark and take possession."

"Nay," said Crawford. "Our ways part here."

Now Vanderberg stared at him, and Bose and the men stared, and a moment of heavy silence settled upon them all. But Frontin's smile grew more saturnine.

"What d'ye mean?" growled Vanderberg, meeting the icy stab of those blue eyes.

"The bark's new and uncommon stout," said Crawford quietly. "No better ship could be found to batter ice. The ketch is near as large as this craft of yours and an even better sailer. I've put no lack of supplies aboard her; indeed, I took her for your use. Move your guns into her and head south or to the devil. I'll take the bark, with my eight Irish and five of the English who want to fare with me to Hudson Bay——"

Vanderberg's eyes blazed. "Eh? Take the bark? I say you shall not." And his big fist crashed down on the table, while the men around uttered blasphemous approval. Vanderberg bawled at the men for silence, reduced himself to calmness by an effort, and turned to Crawford.

"Hark'ee!" said he, leaning forward over the table and giving look for look. "One thing ye forgot. All of us are sworn to certain articles. Any of us may quit the ship whenever he chooses; but company property's another thing. The bark belongs to all of us."

"Ay!" chimed up a chorus of voices. But Crawford laughed a little.

"Who's sworn? Not I. To perdition with your buccaneering articles! As for the bark beings yours—who took her? I did, and I mean to have her. But listen, all of ye! I'll be fair. What's my share of that gold up above?"

"One third to Frontin as discoverer," said the Captain promptly. "The rest in shares. Five to me, two to each officer, one to each man. We voted you an extra share."

"You are generous, and I thank you," said Crawford drily. "But I'll turn back my three shares and take the bark instead. How's that, lads? Vote on it!"

There was a howl of dissent at this, and Vanderberg grinned nastily. He had viewed that bark with a seaman's eye, as had they all, and had found her better than good. Then a sudden thought struck him.

"Why did ye not run with her when ye had her, Crawford?"

Crawford shrugged lightly.

"Why? What I want I take—I don't steal. Bose, will ye go to the bay with me?"

"Nay, sink me if I will!" cried out the big ruffian swiftly. "To a land of ice where devils play all the Winter, and there's but a week i' the year a ship can pass the straits? Not me!"

Crawford looked at Frontin, but the latter made no sign. So he sent his gaze again to Vanderberg, and what he read in the latter's face told him there was storm ahead.

"Take the ketch, Crawford," said Vanderberg, grasping

at this bright thought. "Ye could not work the bark with so few men, anyhow. Take the ketch, and what ye will of the stores. How's that, lads?"

"Ay!" roared up the sudden yell, but Crawford only smiled frostily at them.

"I take the bark," said he quietly.

"Settle it as ye will," said Frontin, laughing, and caught a mug from the table. "I'm up above for a dram."

He worked his way through the crowd, none heeding him, and vanished up the ladder that led to the deck.

"Crawford, be reasonable!" growled Vanderberg, with a ponderous oath. "The bark ye shall not have—so say we all."

"She has three guns trained on you," said Crawford coolly. "Perhaps you noticed how she was moored? She'll blow you all to hell and the gold with you, if I come not back."

Now, at any other time this threat would have won the day, for none doubted that it would be carried out. As it happened, however, the men who had returned with Bose were drunk with exultation and hot raw rum and the touch of gold; and those with Vanderberg were worn to the quick with mad drinking and madder work, so that at a dare they would all of them have attacked the devil and his angels.

Too late, Crawford saw that his main petard had failed to explode. Ugly grins ran along the circle of black and bronzed and bearded faces, and an uglier murmur; hands went fumbling to knives, and men drew closer together before the companionway. Vanderberg showed his great yellow teeth in a grin of sneering anger.

"Ye think that bullies of the main are adread of a shotted gun or two? Ye poor simpleton!"

A wild outburst of laughter went up at this, and devilry was in the laughter. For a moment rang out scurrilous jests and oathy jibes; but as Crawford sat unmoving and quite cool, and as his frosty blue eyes swept them from man to man with a calm unconcern, they presently quieted. Not that they were abashed, however.

"Traitor!" spat a negro, and others caught up the word.

Now they were dangerous, for steel was out; they were persuaded against him in their hearts, and murder came close to the surface. Nor could it be avoided. Massed against him, Vanderberg with them, they had no fear of him now. They were on three sides of him, Bose and the captain at the table, his back to the wall of the cabin. There was a large stern window, but the glass had been smashed and a cloth nailed over it.

Now an irresolute silence. Vanderberg put out a hand and gulped down what was left of the Spanish wine; it mixed ill with rum, for his cheeks fired red at once. Then he cocked his head, listening. In the silence came a squeaking from above, as of a block and tackle at work; but this was instantly forgotten, when Crawford played his last and most desperate card.

He drew two pistols from under his coat and laid them on the table, and calmly primed them with a pinch of powder.

"Gentlemen," he said coolly, "we fail to agree. The one determining factor must be hot lead, if ye'll have it so. So far as my share of the gold is concerned, I'll give it to the fellows aboard the ketch who want to join you,

but the bark is mine. I'm going back to her. Any of you lads want to ship with me?"

"We'd ship wi' the foul fiend sooner," muttered one of them.

Crawford laughed.

"You'll do that if ye try to stop me, lads. Careful, cap'n! Here are two pistols, and ye have none. I'll——"

"Your high hand has gripped too far this time!" bawled Vanderberg, and shoved back his chair. "Stop him, lads! Give him the steel."

Even before the word was spoken, the surging movement of men began, and Crawford knew there was no more hope. Therefore, he acted.

With one movement he lifted the heavy table with his knees, threw his shoulder against it, and hurled it back upon Vanderberg and the men. One of them plunged at him with knife ready, and Crawford's pistol roared in his very face. Over his body Crawford leaped for the ladder, and shot down with his second pistol a negro in his way. Then he was upon the ladder.

The hand of the dying negro clamped upon his ankle.

A long howl, as of ravening beasts, filled the cabin; the men hurtled forward, knives out, fighting each other to get at the tripped figure. The empty pistols smashed in their faces, but they gripped him, they had him down, they dragged him back from the ladder and seethed above him in a wild tangle of fighting shapes. In that confined space the reek of powder went to their lungs and brains. They were no longer men, but blood-scenting beasts, each of them striving only to sink his knife into the man who had dared them. The powder-smoke rolled up to the ceil-

ing and back down upon them, blinding everything, creating an obscurity that was hideous with yells and the spreading stink of raw blood. Man slashed man indiscriminately. The roaring bellow of Vanderberg was drowned in yells and maddened oaths.

In one corner the twisting mass of men disintegrated. Crawford, writhing from the heart of the blind fury, came to one knee, knife and tomahawk in hand. A Frenchman screamed out horribly. Coming to his feet, Crawford dimly beheld the hulking figure of Bose rushing at him; he slipped aside, struck out with the deadly tomahawk, felt the blade sink in between ear and shoulder. Neck half severed, dead in his stride, Bose pitched forward headlong at the cloth covering the window, burst it away, lingered limply for an instant over the sill, and then lurched through the smashed frame and was gone. The morning sunlight streamed in across the reek of powder.

Crawford plunged for the window, seeing there his one chance of getting clear. He was at it, had a hand at the opening, when a man swung into him full force, hurled him aside, drove at him with a knife. They went down together, and now the pack was upon him once more with shrill yells as the new flood of light betrayed their prey.

Again Crawford rose, back to window, and cut with knife and axe at the ringing faces. Knives bit back; blood was streaming from him in a dozen places. Then, flailing his way through the midst of them, splitting the serried rank asunder, came Vanderberg, whirling in both hands a leg from the wrecked table. He whirled and struck. Crawford ducked the blow, the club struck the cabin wall—and the tomahawk left Crawford's hand.

Too slow! Vanderberg interposed the club, and the steel glanced. Again the table-leg swung; as it fell, Crawford darted inside the blow, though the force of it jarred him to the heels, and struck out with his knife. The point raked across Vanderberg's brow, no more, and from one side came a thrown knife that struck Crawford over the temple, but haft first. He threw out his arms, caught at the cabin wall, fell to one knee, crouched.

A wild howl roared up, and the men surged in on him. Then, under their very hands and knives, he sprang. The leap took him upward, sent him head first through the window-opening, banged his hips against the frame—and he was gone.

Meantime, regardless of the raging tumult down below, Frontin had been hard at work on deck. He got his dram of rum, then he clapped on the companion-hatch and stoppered it. Moving with incredible agility, he went to the smashed mahogany chests, filled two of them with the scattered gold bars, whipped slings around them, and drew in the block and tackle, still reeved, which had brought them aboard.

One by one he lowered them into the boat lying alongside. From the men crowded at the rail of bark and ketch, who had heard the two pistol-shots, were coming angry shouts and queries, but Frontin only waved his hand at them and followed the chests down into the boat. This was a perilous matter, since now she rode heavily, but he put an oar from the stern and began to scull. He went, not toward the other craft nor the shore, but along the side of the *Irondeille* to the stern, where he waited.

He was still waiting there, a twisted grin upon his thin

lips, anxiety in his glittering eyes, when Crawford dropped all asprawl into the water. An instant later Frontin was bending above the spot, while heads crowded through the stern window above and yells roared at him. He grinned, waved his hand. They watched, wondering at his purpose there.

The wonder was soon flamed into wild rage when they saw him pull the dripping figure of Crawford in over the stern. Weak, half-conscious, yet wakened anew by his icy immersion, Crawford came over the gunnel and managed to drag himself to the thwart, as Frontin bent to the oar. The yells of fury from above died away, for the boat shot back around the side of the ketch.

"You came by the wrong road," said Crawford, gasping. "Why the devil didn't you get 'em in the rear? Sink me, man, I'd given up hope of help from you."

Frontin fastened upon him a saturnine regard. Crawford was looking up at the ship.

"I'm not a fool," he said, "and I had no pistols. No need to look up! The hatch is clapped on. I had to get this gold of mine."

Crawford glanced around at the chests, and broke into a laugh. From the *Irondelle* came a hammering and pounding, a wild roar of muffled voices.

"Now's your chance," said Frontin coolly. "Say the word and I'll slip aboard her, or call your men from the bark. Touch fire to her, take the gold, and leave the dogs to roast. Eh?"

"Plague take the gold, and them with it, you ruffian!" said Crawford. He could feel the strength ebbing out of him rapidly. "What brought you to aid me?"

Frontin squinted at the bark, and made a slight gesture.

"The Star of Dreams," said he, and laughed thinly. "But tell me swiftly what you want me to do. I don't think you're hurt to death, yet in another minute the blood will be drained out of you——"

"Some of the English aboard the ketch will join me. Get them. Set a course for the north. Tell Phelim not to fire the guns——"

"And yonder ketch?"

"Leave her here—for Vanderberg." Crawford uttered a wild, swift laugh. "'Twas he and you gave the Star into my hands. Then I was a homeless, destitute wanderer, an escaped felon; now I've a stout ship, a heavy lading, true friends to aid, and the Star of Dreams to lead into the north—into the north, over the horizon—always over the horizon! Ay, after all——"

"After all?" prompted Frontin, as the words failed weakly.

"After all, Vanderberg made only one mistake—he—he opposed the—destiny of—the Star of—Dreams——"

Crawford's head drooped, and he pitched forward off the thwart, senseless. But Frontin, rapidly working the oar, glanced down at the reddening body with a thin smile.

"Nay, nay!" he murmured. "That talk will do for fools, but not for me. Where poor Vanderberg made his mistake, was in opposing the destiny of Harry Crawford! *En avant*—the Star goes north, and I follow it. Immortality awaits us; whether we gain immortality by pike-thrust, bullet, or frost, what matter?"

He shrugged a little, then dropped his oar and deftly

caught the line flung to him by Sir Phelim Burke of Murtha.

Ten minutes afterward, the bark was standing out of the cove toward the ice blink on the north horizon.

BOOK II

THE FUR PIRATE

CHAPTER I

EVEN IN A WILDERNESS, ONE CANNOT ESCAPE THE DEVIL

“**I**F your Star Woman lies this way, cap’n,” said Frontin, “devil take me if I want to find her! This ice—ah! A shot in this wilderness? Was that a gunshot or an ice-creak?”

Crawford seized his arm, stood listening. “A shot, true enough! Dead ahead of us. Bear to the left, I’ll bear to the right. Watch yourself!”

The two men separated.

Although it was August and the wide expanse of Hudson Bay was now open water, all the winter’s freeze was thrust here at the straits for exit, and not a ship had entered. No ship could fight this frozen sea until the jam burst. August, indeed? Here at the straits the very word was intolerable mockery.

Here nothing was in sight but ice and fog. The heavens above, the earth beneath, the waters under the earth, were all congealed into dead greyness; there was not even the blue shimmer of sun-struck bergs. Everything was unreal. The ear was assailed by a low, unceasing groan, which now rose into a crescendo of unearthly crashes and shrieks and again rolled in dim reverberant thunders, felt rather than heard; this came from the ice, floes and small bergs and crushed mountains hanging at crazy angles, all hurled into one inchoate mass by

the tremendous urge of the bay waters trying to crowd through the narrow straits to the sea.

In the air was that bitter and penetrating chill which comes of melting floes—a chill mocking at furs, thrusting into the very heart and entrails of the two men who appeared and vanished again, crawling across that drear expanse. To the northwest, hidden among the white masses, the position of the bark *Northstar* was marked by a thread of smoke two miles away; even this smoke looked cold and shivery as it wound shuddering into the sky and fog. To east and south rose the steep and awful cliffs of Cape Digge and the strait; they ran, ice-dripping, into heaven and melted in the horizon fog, cold barriers set two thousand feet in air to keep the inland sea cloaked in thin mist and bitter chill. Digge's Island was a dim blur; to west and south were grinding, crushing bergs and floes. Overhead was dun sunlight drowned in high fog—a ghastly and unearthly fog which threatened to close down again in an hour or two and add its clammy fingers to the merciless grip of the ice.

"The shot came from about here," called Crawford, giving a hallo to which none answered. He paused on a rounded hummock to sweep the surrounding surface with his gaze. From his left, where Frontin was toiling among upflung masses of rough ice, broke a sudden sharp cry.

"Here we are, cap'n! Name of the saints—come and look!"

Turning, Crawford hastened to join his lieutenant, scrambling over pinnacles and avoiding pools of melted water. Frontin, poised on a ridge of broken masses, uttered a curt comment.

"No hurry. He's dead, or I'm a liar!"

Cursing the bitter chill, Crawford climbed up beside this tall and saturnine comrade and friend, this Frontin of the cynical air and the warm heart. Reaching the ridge, he found himself looking down at a hollow, an icepan closed in all around by crushed pinnacles, like an open glade in a forest. Below the two men, at the near side of this hollow, lay the outstretched shape of a huge white bear, the top of its head blown away—and beside this, the motionless figure of a man, apparently an Eskimo, lying across a gun.

"These Eskimos have no fusils and don't use powder," said Crawford, for despite his astonishment, his brain was quickly at work. "Yet—where could he have come from? Certainly no ship has come ahead of us—the Eskimos told us that much. One might have followed us into the straits——"

Frontin waved his hand at the ice around.

"One or a dozen. We ha' been carried in the ice for weeks, up one channel and down another—ah! I see that heaven has declared me a liar." He moved suddenly. "The man's not dead after all."

The two clambered down, leaping and sliding into the hollow where the ice was pooled with blood. Frontin turned the man over, lifted head to lap, tenderly soothed the poor hurt and disemboweled thing that had been human before the claws of the bear ripped so deep and far. The man's eyelids fluttered open, and his vacant gaze fell upon Crawford. He spoke feebly in English.

"The smoke—the smoke! It is a sure sign; I tell you, haste and slay them—no parley, no hesitation! No quar-

ter to man or woman. English or French, slay them or they will kill us all. That smoke means a ship. I—I—ah! You—you are not Moses Deakin! Who are you?"

Intelligence leaped into those eyes, a last flicker of fast-dying fires.

"Where are you from?" demanded Crawford imperatively. "Your ship? Where is she?"

"Blast you to hell and sink you lower!" was the response. "Ho, Moses—Moses Deakin! No quarter to them—no quarter——"

That was all. The hurt thing was at peace.

Now silence fell upon the two men—silence of wondering and slow comprehension. Frontin rose, turned his dark and glittering gaze upon the empty white desert surrounding them; his saturnine, hawk-nosed visage was wrinkled in perplexity. Crawford began to stuff tobacco into his pipe and stared down at the dead man, his wide and heavy-lidded eyes veiled thoughtfully. Frost and bleak winds had darkened the thin lines of nose and cheek and chin since he had left Newfoundland behind him, only to intensify their hard and aggressive determination.

Whence had this man come? No other ships had come through the roaring turmoil of the straits, according to the Eskimos. For weeks the *Northstar* had been carried back and forth and roundabout in the grip of ice and fog and currents, now out almost to open water, now back in the straits with the drift. Yet the presence of this man showed that some other ship was at hand, and any other ship spelled peril of the utmost to Hal Crawford.

Here in the bitter north, as on the golden main to the south, powder was the only lawgiver. During a genera-

tion and more, English, French and Bostonnais had disputed for possession of Hudson's great bay and its beaver trade. A year previously, the English Company of Adventurers had swept the French from the bay posts; what would happen this year or the next, no man could predict. The Iroquois war whoop had resounded from the dark pines these ten years, meeting at the apex of a great overland triangle the scalp-yell of the Sioux. The heroic Danish colony had perished in mad horror years ago. Freebooters and fur pirates slipped in through the straits and out again before the ice formed. Here only the fittest could survive; the conquered met with no quarter, whether from man or from nature.

"Queer words, cap'n," said Frontin reflectively. "He was repeating something that he had previously said. He must have seen our smoke. H'm! Then he would not have shot the bear unless forced to it. He was scouting us, eh? The bear attacked him, they killed each other——"

"Ay," said Crawford, opening his firebag.

"No quarter, quoth he," resumed Frontin. "Death of my life! There is nothing in sight, though his ship may be hidden like ours. That name of Moses Deakin—a singular name! Have ye ever heard it before?"

"Ay," said Crawford again.

Frontin turned and gazed curiously at him, while he fumbled with flint and steel. Presently he had the tinder aglow—and abruptly he pinched it out. A sudden blaze swept into his steel-blue eyes. He hastily thrust away pipe and firebag.

"I have it—quick, now!" he exclaimed sharply. "Two

men were out together, even as we are. Moses Deakin left this man, started back to their ship. He'll have heard the gunshot and will return to see what it means. Back, out of sight! It's our chance to catch him—and if we catch Moses Deakin we have the best prize on the bay. Back, back! Prime the guns and wait!"

Frontin paused not to reason why, but slid away and vanished among the hummocks above. Crawford stooped over the dead man and explored beneath the torn, frozen-red garments. His hand came away with a crinkle of paper, and he gave the document one sharp look that widened his eyes. Then he hastily turned the body face down as it had first lain, and followed his lieutenant into hiding. No footsteps had left any trace on the ice. Here was death and nothing else.

Crouched beside Frontin among the hummocks, Crawford briefly told what he knew of this Moses Deakin.

"A Boston fur-pirate; I heard queer tales of him both in New York and Boston. They say he's a great, hard, cold devil who sees visions, has dealings with the foul fiend and is cruel as any Mohawk. It is supposed that he has a secret post somewhere on the bay and agents among the Indians; he sneaks in and gets his furs when the straits open, and goes again swiftly. This is rumour, but he's reality. Either the French or the English would blow him out of the water if they could catch him at work—he's done them both a deal of harm."

"We don't care for furs," said Frontin. "Then why is he of value to us?"

"Because they say he knows the bay as no other man does—every river and shallow of it. That's how he eludes

capture. You comprehend? If we catch him, we find the northwest passage and the south sea beyond."

"But," said Frontin thoughtfully, "I thought you had been tempted by the Star Woman, of whom Iberville told you!"

"An Indian legend, a wild dream!" Crawford's tone was impatient. "If nothing better offered, I'd chance it—but not if we can catch Moses Deakin and find the northwest passage!"

Frontin shrugged. The two men now waited silent, motionless; from their position no moving object could be seen, but this meant little. Except from some high elevation, a man or a dozen men could not be sighted among these heaped-up masses of ice. Then, suddenly, Frontin touched Crawford's elbow. Among the opposite crags of ice, across the hollow, appeared a moving shape which came abruptly into full view and paused to look down upon the scene of death. A great and grim man was this, whose entire bearing conveyed a singular impression of iron resolution and dominance.

A fur cap covered his head. Merging with the shaggy fur, an immense beard of grizzled black swept across his lower face and hung in two bushy prongs over his barrel of a chest. Between cap and beard were visible a massive, wide-nostriled nose and two most remarkable eyes. They were deeply set and far apart, beneath shaggy grizzled brows; they were extremely large, insolent, commanding, of a light and steely gray which contrasted strongly with the mass of jet hair. Across his shoulders lay a fusil, which he now suddenly lifted and fired in air.

"A signal!" breathed Frontin. "Now is our time——"

"No—no!" denied Crawford, his low word desperately urgent. "Look! We are lost——"

The gunshot had been answered by a burst of calls and shouts, so unexpected and so close that both watchers started. At once other men came into view, half a dozen of them, along the opposite ridge of ice. In a flash Crawford perceived his frightful error of calculation. The dead man had been companioned, not by Deakin alone, but by all these others!

Crawford met the crisis after his usual fashion. Setting his mouth to Frontin's ear, ignoring the group who were swiftly descending the opposite slope toward the bodies of man and bear, he spoke rapidly.

"Keep my gun, stay hidden; be ready for anything. If I go with them, watch and get a bearing on where their ship lies. Keep the smoke-flare going from the bark. You comprehend? They know all about us, we know nothing about them. Here—take care of this paper."

Into Frontin's hand he thrust the paper taken from the dead man; then he rose and strode forward. He was apparently unarmed, knife and tomahawk being hidden.

As Crawford thus swung into their sight, descending from the icy ridge to the hollow, the group of men stared at him for half a moment in gaping amazement. Then their guns swung up, but he spoke out with a cool assurance that gave them pause.

"Careful, Cap'n Deakin, careful! You're outnumbered and have stumbled into a very neat ambushade. Ho, Frontin! Bid one of the men to fire in the air, that our good Moses may realize his position."

"Ay, cap'n," responded Frontin's voice, followed by the roar of a fusil in air.

Astounded by the appearance of Crawford, finding themselves apparently surrounded by hidden foes as they huddled there in the ice-hollow, the half-dozen Boston men dared not move. They crowded around Moses Deakin, who was measuring Crawford with his bold, hard gaze. Startled though he was, the fur-pirate was unafraid.

"Well?" he demanded truculently. "Who the devil may you be, that you know my name?"

Crawford, suiting action to utterance, surveyed him with a slight and whimsical smile.

"My dear Deakin," he responded calmly, "we ought to know you, since we've had men posted around your ship since last night! If we bore you any ill will, we might have taken that craft of yours a dozen times over. But to what end? As the redskins say, I'm bringing you a belt of white wampum and a calumet. Agree to a truce, and I'll go over to your ship with you and have a friendly talk."

"Your name?" growled Deakin, obviously taken all aback.

"Crawford."

"Blood and wounds! Not Hal Crawford, the pirate?" cried Deakin, while his men gaped and stared at hearing the name.

"So called. Come—is it peace or war? Give your word; I'll accept it."

Deakin was not the sort to hesitate when trapped. He put out his hand and advanced, giving Crawford a

mighty grip. He made answer with apparent heartiness, yet with a ruthless treachery thinly veiled in those domineering eyes of his.

"Ay! Come aboard with us; peace it is, cap'n. To the ship, lads, and out o' this! The flood tide be lifting this accursed ice. Leave the corpse where it is."

Crawford turned and lifted his voice. "Frontin! Take the men back to the ship and signal in all the crew. If I do not return in three hours, come over the ice and hang Moses Deakin."

"Ay, cap'n," the unseen Frontin made reply.

Deakin showed huge yellow teeth through his beard at this threat, then rumbled out a laugh and turned. He set off for the southeast with Crawford beside him, while the men draggled after them and cast frightened glances at the desolate expanse of ice, now cracking and groaning and heaving from the rise of water below. No word was spoken. Since the hour lay close upon noon, Crawford guessed that the Bostonnais and his men were hungry.

So far, so good, he reflected. Whether he could carry through the bluff was of no great consequence; he scarcely even thought of the issue. Since he dared not betray his real ignorance by asking any questions, he accompanied Deakin in silence until he made out a tracery of spars lying ahead. Presently he discovered that the fur-pirate lay barely three miles away from the *Northstar*, in under the frowning cliffs of the mainland and close to the great cape itself.

Closer approach showed the Boston ship to be a large square-rigged corvette carrying three heavy guns to a side; by name, the *Albemarle*. When he found that

Deakin had nearly thirty men aboard his rover, Crawford grimaced at thought of his little bark with her crew of fourteen. Presently they were up the side of the ice-gripped corvette, and Crawford followed his host aft to the main cabin. A wild, shaggy crew of men they were who stared at him, and scurvy had brushed some of them with its hideous hand.

Once down below, Crawford seated himself alone with Deakin, and a lanky boy fetched them pannikins of food and mugs of grog. A boatswain entered and asked for orders; Deakin gave them curtly, crisply, and dipped fingers in pannikin again. Crawford perceived that while this man was uncouth as any bear, he yet possessed strange depths of bravery, treachery, perhaps madness.

"And now to talk!" Deakin swigged his rum, accepted the tobacco Crawford offered, and made a light. "What force have ye? Half down with scurvy, I'll warrant."

"Force enough, and not a touch of scurvy so far."

"That's a lie," was the blunt response. Crawford's blue eyes narrowed.

"Softly, Master Deakin! Once for that word is enough. Any more of it and I'll put steel into you! Guard your tongue better. Who was that man mangled by the bear?"

"My lieutenant." Deakin gazed unwinkingly at his visitor. In his bold stare lay a more deadly menace than that which Crawford had just put into voice. "Had been three year with me. What sort o' ship have ye got?"

"A bark." Crawford put the light to his pipe and puffed. "I'm no pirate, as ye miscall me. I've no interest in furs or gain. I'm looking for the place that's over the horizon, and count on getting help from you."

The shaggy brows drew down. "What place is it, then?"

"Whatever may be there." Crawford coolly put his hand inside his shirt, and drew out the Star of Dreams that hung on its thong. At sight of it, Deakin's eyes opened wide. "The star, Cap'n Deakin—my star of dreams! I follow the sign. Call it a madman's fancy, if ye like; I seek only freedom, clear action, a chance to be myself. I'm sick of the struggle for pelf and place and power—I want a fresher world. I have goods and provisions and gold aboard the bark, and need to rob naught from other men. If others—mark it well!—think to rob me, I have teeth and can use 'em."

"Others have teeth, for that matter," said Moses Deakin, and those big eyes of his narrowed slightly as Crawford thrust away the star. "Blood and wounds! How d'ye expect me to believe such a tale? Who comes into these seas, but for furs?"

"I do, for one," was the cool response. "You have reason—use it! If I wanted loot, what easier than to take your ship? Then to seek that hidden trading post of yours and loot it. But that's nonsense—we have no quarrel. Here's what I want of you: Is it true, as pilots say, that from the northwest of this bay a passage leads to the south seas?"

Deakin frowned upon his questioner. His eyes glimmered in a way that Crawford disliked; they glinted with suspicion, with crafty search, with a slow and heavy pondering.

"Not to my knowledge," he made answer at length, "and I should know if any man does. Last year the

French ships drove me far up to the nor'west, where I talked with Injuns. This folly of a south sea passage means naught."

So positive was Deakin's tone, so filled with assured conviction were his words, that Crawford could not but feel in this moment that he had been following a false trail. Deakin should know—that was true. If Deakin said no passage existed, then it might well be accepted as a fact.

While Crawford puffed in frowning silence, however, Deakin now continued with an abrupt change of topic and manner.

"What's to hinder me keeping you here while my men go take your ship? There's two hundred pound for you in Boston, dead or alive. You ha' gold aboard, and supplies that are worth more than gold in these parts. What's to hinder, eh?"

Crawford's thin lips emitted a thin cloud of smoke.

"Try it and see. What's two hundred pound and the loot of a bark, as against a winter's stock o' furs? A poor gamble, Cap'n Deakin. My men would give you as good as they got."

Deakin's teeth shone through his beard, and his eyes smouldered darkly. "I'll swallow no such tale of a south sea passage. H'm! You've not been i' the bay before, neither; but what about Frontin, your lieutenant—eh? Ay, I've heard of that French pirate! And sink me, but that explains it well enough, that does!"

"Explains what?" asked Crawford, somewhat astonished by these heavy ruminations.

"Your being here. No doubt Frontin caught some

thread o' the tale; likely, the French Company's men heard it from the redskins. And you're just fool enough to go look into it. Fool! H'm! You and your star—honest enough in that folly, too! Ye did wrong to show me that star, for I have a nose to scent with. Warlock, that's what ye are, and I can see it all now. You have heard the tale, but so have I."

"Eh?" Crawford was suddenly alert, as the dog who scents unseen game. "What tale?"

"The Star Woman, o' course!"

With an air of irritated finality, as though he had found the answer to a troublous problem, Deakin lifted his mug and drained it. He banged down the pewter, licked his hairy lips, grunted savagely. Then he continued, his gaze fastened on Crawford.

"Ay, the Star Woman! Makes ye jump, eh? I've guessed it, sure enough. Little you know of her, though; while I've seen her—if not in the flesh, then otherwise. No white man has seen her in the flesh, and few enough o' the red devils; oh, ye cunning liar! It's not nor'west that you're seeking, but west and south. Well, whilst French and English are there, neither you nor I will do much looking in that direction. Dost know there's a host of ships behind us in the straits, icebound?"

"Ships?" repeated Crawford, catching swiftly at the more essential news despite his amazed wonder at the man's talk of the Star Woman. "How d'ye know?"

"Why, I saw them, as I saw the Star Woman. French ships o' the line, English frigates—bah! Come up on deck and talk in the open air. Plague upon this stuffy cabin!"

Moses Deakin shoved back his chair and rose. Crawford accompanied him to the ladder, still lost in marvel at what he had heard. At the ladder, Deakin motioned him to mount.

Then, as Crawford's back was turned, Moses Deakin threw up his arm and struck. The blow, sharp and light but deadly as an arrow, drove home to the base of the brain. Crawford fell against the ladder, then rolled down, paralyzed.

So there, it seemed, the Star of Dreams had led but to an ill fortune.

While these things chanced aboard the *Albemarle*, and the day dragged on, Frontin was heavily making his way back to his own ship. He did not regain the *Northstar* until afternoon; and if there was dismay in his own heart, he brought stark consternation to those aboard her.

It was a strangely diverse company that grouped around him to hear the tale he spat out between bites of food. The six Englishmen were hardy rascals who cared only that they should never see an English gaol again, following Crawford with blind infatuation. The eight Irishmen followed Crawford largely because Sir Phelim Burke did so, since they loved Phelim beyond measure. Only one of them could speak or write English.

"I sighted her ship and got bearings on her," concluded Frontin. "Can lead ye there in the dark, for she's fast in shore ice; but what use? I saw that big bear of a man come up from below alone, roar at his men, and shake his fist toward us. The cap'n is trapped and gone."

Sir Phelim Burke uttered a low groan of despair, and turned to stare helplessly at the fog which clamped them

in. They stood on the maindeck—there was no frost in the air, only the chill of melting ice. The *Northstar*, rigged in the fashion which another twenty years was to know as “schooner,” lay grappled to a small berg. She was a new ship of oak, and the ice-battering had not so much as started a butt in her. Yet Frontin, as he drearily climbed aboard, had noted something which started his brain to frantic work.

Within the past half-hour fog had come down—heavy, cloaking mist that lay about them like an evil thing. Through it penetrated the groaning of the floes; even the berg beside them was filled with long heavings and shudderings and queer noises. The ice was all in movement, as it moved each day at high tide, now back and now forth, in a slow and regular motion with the varying trend of shore-currents and ice-drift. Blocked by the huge jam across the mouth of the straits, these outer masses were gradually disintegrating.

“Say the word, Master Frontin,” spoke up one of the Englishmen, “and we be off with ye. We’ll not let the cap’n bide on yon ship without a fight.”

Frontin gave him a bleak look. “Go aloft, Dickon, and keep sharp watch. The fog has come down low, and up above it thins quickly. Watch sharp for the direction of the drift.”

Dickon departed, and Frontin sent the other men to sleep and rest. Sir Phelim dully repeated the order to his Irish, and presently Frontin and Burke remained alone.

“What hope?” said Burke, despair in his branded, weary countenance. “Even is Hal not dead, how can we

help? I understand your meaning, Frontin. The ice is moving us, and the fog has settled down. We cannot find that accursed ship now."

"I can find her in hell, when the time comes," said Frontin. He drained a mug of wine, wiped his lips, and settled back against the rail. When he had a tinder-match alight, he set it to his pipe and puffed comfortably.

"The cap'n is not dead, Sir Phelim, depend upon it! I think that he gave this Deakin too large a tale—frightened him. So Deakin caught him off guard and clamped him in irons. Why? No doubt to serve as hostage. That order to me, bidding me come over and hang Deakin unless the cap'n returned, frightened the man, set him thinking. This Deakin is no fool. He guessed that we could not come over and hang him, or take his ship either."

"Then what do you propose?"

"To do it, since he thinks we cannot," said Frontin coolly.

Burke regarded him steadily. "How can you find that ship again?"

Frontin smiled his thin, sardonic smile. "We've calculated the drift each day. The Bostonnais is inside the drift by the shore ice, and will not move until the outer ice has broken up or gone. There is no hurry. Perhaps this Deakin will set out to scout our ship and discover her position and strength. Sir Phelim, do you believe in omens?"

Burke now regarded him with some uneasiness. There was about this Frenchman, whose affection for Crawford was beyond words, something deep and terrible; his man-

ner held a gloomy exultation. Burke, being in despondent mood, was ready to see misfortune in this or anything else.

"Omens? Well—at times. But you spoke of Deakin coming to scout our ship?"

"Yes. He will do it. He can find her."

"But he will discover our weakness!"

Frontin snapped his fingers. "Let him. Now, return to our omens! For example, that star which the cap'n wears. You believe in that Star of Dreams?"

Burke smiled a sad and twisted smile.

"I believe in his belief, my dear Frontin. He and you and I—we follow that star out of the world, over the horizon; it is a symbol of the happiness that we have never found, and will never find alive. It has led us here to this desolate spot. Is that an omen? Then all this damned and icebound northland is an omen, for we Irish believe that hell is a place of snow and ice. Has this fog a father? Out of whose womb came this ice, and who has gendered the hoary frost of heaven?"

"We can dispense with poetry, which has a suspiciously Biblical sound," said Frontin drily. "Thank heaven I am no Irishman, to make misfortunes into poetry! Instead, I make them into a ladder."

Sir Phelim laughed. "Poet yourself, dark man! Well, why all this talk of omens and the star that we follow?"

"Because I propose to follow it now."

For an instant Burke did not get the full import of these words, until something in the tone, in the glinting dark eyes, of Frontin gave him enlightenment. Then he started.

"Impossible! That were rank madness——"

Frontin lifted his hand, made an imperturbable gesture.

"Listen! Listen!"

The trembling grind of the crushing floes and bergs had never ceased. As he listened, however, Sir Phelim gradually detected a new and different sound—a strange sound that blanched his weathered cheeks and widened his eyes in horrified comprehension. This sound was a slow and relentless groan which emanated from the very heart of the bark herself. By some convergent pressure, her timbers were being squeezed and ground between floes and berg. A fraction of an inch at a time, she was being crushed.

"We have a choice," said Frontin coolly, when he saw that the other understood. "We may stay here and fight, blast holes in the ice, open a channel—and abandon the cap'n. We cannot rescue both him and the ship. Time presses, and we lack men."

"But you would leave her, and all she contains?"

"Follow the star!" Frontin uttered a short, hard laugh.

"Follow the star, take that other ship——"

"Man, are you mad?" broke out Sir Phelim. "You yourself have gold aboard here, and we cannot carry it over the ice!"

"The devil gave the gold, let him take it again," and Frontin waved his pipe carelessly. "Do you love gold? Neither do I. The Star of Dreams has gone aboard another ship, and we follow. That is all. Her crew outnumber us, true, but they have no star."

Burke frowned thoughtfully. "Yet the ice is moving. There will be open channels to cross."

"We shall take the small boat to cross them, then. Listen! The movement has increased; all the ice outside here is moving now. Perhaps we have reached the end of this abominable delay! To-night we may either be free of the ice, or again inclosed. However, I can find that corvette."

They were silent. That horrible squeezing groan of wrenched oak was no longer to be heard. Perhaps the pressure on the bark was relieved, perhaps the sound was drowned in the increasing tumult from the fog-wrapped ice all around. The tumult had become a cacaphony of hideous noise. Out there in the fog the ice was heaving up in great masses and falling again, bursting into fragments, sliding and rending and crashing.

A hasty call from the man aloft brought Frontin to his feet. He darted into the cabin for a spyglass, then mounted the rigging. Sir Phelim Burke remained where he was, lost in surmise. He knew that Frontin had brought a mass of gold aboard the bark—was the Frenchman ready to abandon this gold utterly? That bespoke a greater love for Crawford than Burke had visioned in the man, who was outwardly so bitter and cynical.

"Damn the ice! The plan is madness, madness manifold!" Sir Phelim threw out his hands and gripped the rail in despair, as he stared at the fog. "Heart of the world gone wrong, and broken men adrift who pin faith to a star and drive across the horizon, blindly! Well, I think that this is not the first time men have trailed a star—but they were wise men. We are fools, Hal Crawford, and we love you—and are fools."

Up above, Frontin was standing beside the pointing

Dickon, incredulity in his face as he hurriedly focused his glass. The sullen grinding and crashing of the ice had come to a sudden pause, and the drift had ceased. That drift had been to the northward. The fog, here little more than ice-steam, did not lift but clung close down; up above, however, there was a faint stir of wind which helped to dissipate the upper layers of mist, stirring it all into yeasty heavings.

From the masthead, Frontin could make out the line of coast, or rather the cape, and calculated that the bark had drifted two or three miles farther back toward the straits. There in the north the fog was thicker and heavier, a massive bank of greyness, now swirling away, now parting for a moment, now abruptly closing again. Frontin waited for another such shifting, his glass fastened toward the end of the cape. The grey wall parted abruptly—parted to disclose a tiny, fluttering bit of colour set in its midst. Nothing else was to be seen save this scrap of colour: the flag of England, set apparently in the sky and fog. Then a sudden shrill cry burst from the man Dickon.

“Rot me—off to larboard, master! Look quick!”

Frontin swung around, and a low word broke from his lips. A great eddy of the moving fogbank had blown an open lane—a perfect channel through the mist, walled on either hand. Looking down this lane, as though the scene had been there set for his sight by some whimsy of the invisible fingers which manipulated ice and fog and sea, Frontin had one swift glimpse of a towering frigate, all sail set, not three miles distant—and from her poop drooped the white flag of France! Even as he looked, the fog closed down again and she was gone like a dream-

vision. The English flag, over by the cape, had also vanished. Frontin closed his glass and descended to the deck, a touch of colour in his cheeks, his dark eyes aglow. He came to Sir Phelim and clapped the latter on the shoulder.

"Eh?" cried the startled Irishman. "What's happened? Ye look strange——"

"It's what is about to happen!" and Frontin laughed joyously. "Death of my life—who, think you, is out there in the fog?"

"Crawford?"

"No—Iberville! His fleet must have followed us through the straits. I saw the *Profound* lying out yonder not a league distant; I ought to know the old brute of a ship, since I once——" Here Frontin checked himself and bit his lip, then continued more carefully. "She has been under Iberville's orders for two years, therefore the rest of his fleet must be in the straits. And off the cape is an English ship. Come! While the lions fight, the jackals may seize the bone. To work! If we were sure of heaven, we might tamely accept fate; but being minded to stay out of hell as long as possible, we'll fight. All hands on deck! Sir Phelim, you and your Irishmen get up food, rum or wine, and arms. Dickon, down from aloft!"

Now Frontin, knowing that the ice movement had halted with the tide, did a singular and characteristic thing. In the galley was still smouldering a fire, whence the smoke-signal had been drifting aloft all day. He ran to it, seized the ends of brands and whipped them into the embers, raked all the fire into a pot, crammed in some

rotten canvas used for tinder, and with the flaming pot aswing in his hand darted down the deck aft—and chucked the whole thing into the stern cabins. Then he whirled upon the shouting, startled men who thought him gone mad, and his voice drove at them.

“Quick! Ships are close to us, all around us—an English fleet! The bark’s being crushed i’ the ice; our only hope is to get away and take the corvette that holds Cap’n Crawford—swift, before the flames reach the powder!”

Cursing and shouting mad oaths, furious terror and alarm plucking at them, the men scrambled to obey. Sir Phelim whipped his Irish with crackling Gaelic words, while Frontin got the other men at work swinging out the tiny skiff from the stern, with the smoke rolling up from below and the thought of powder-kegs to drive them with the spur of necessity.

Now, as though to increase their mad frenzy of haste, came out of the whole ship a frightful scream of twisted oak. She began to move upward, slowly, as the ice nipped and lifted her, started its work of rending through her hull. Into the skiff went fusils and pistols and blades, food and drink; one by one the men dropped to the ice, seized ropes and made fast to the skiff, or lifted at her bodily, each man cursing his neighbour to make more haste. Then they drew away from the heaving, groaning mass of timber, stumbling and slipping over the ice, following the tall figure of Frontin and the shorter, limping Phelim Burke.

So the fog closed around them.

After a little a ruddy brightness shone through the obscurity in their rear, as the red flames leaped higher.

After this had died and vanished behind the heavy curtain of fog, came a sullen, booming detonation that shook the great floes, flung the men all asprawl on the ice, and left a frightful desolation in their hearts.

“Forward!” shouted Frontin, and they struggled up.

CHAPTER II

WHEN FOG LIFTS, THE ROAD CLEARS

ALTHOUGH dazed and momentarily paralyzed by the blow which felled him, Crawford did not quite lose consciousness. He dimly realized that he was being dragged back into the cabin by the Bostonnais; then felt himself lifted and placed in a chair and firmly lashed to it. Deakin rumbled with laughter.

"A good blow, one worth learning! You're not hurt—come around after a bit——"

Deakin stamped out and ascended to the deck above.

Sagging down in the chair with closed eyes, Crawford relaxed utterly and rested while he might, wasting no thought on his own carelessness; he had been caught, and must face the future instead of the past. After a time his senses cleared again and the agonized ache slowly passed from his head and neck and nerve-centers, until presently he dropped into a light doze. From this he was wakened by a heavy trampling on deck, and heard the stentorian tones of Deakin bellowed forth through a speaking trumpet. Deakin had a voice like brass.

"Come back, come back!" roared the words, and again: "Come back!"

So the Bostonnais was calling in his men. After a little Crawford jerked up his head and came wide awake as Deakin returned into the cabin.

"Ha! The ice be on the move again, and if those fools

o' mine be not s pry, they'll get caught. Well, well—let's have your 'bacca."

Stooping over his prisoner, Deakin swiftly searched him, throwing weapons, pipe and tobacco pouch to the table, and finally drawing forth the Star of Dreams on its thong. During a long moment he hesitated over the emerald jewel, greed fighting in his large eyes against a stronger fear; then he reluctantly shoved it back beneath Crawford's shirt.

"Not that, not that!" he rumbled heavily. "There's wizardry in it, and I'll ha' no warlock after me o' nights. 'Twas the star that brought ye here, yourself said it; and Moses Deakin knows when to let things bide. Nay, I'll not touch the thing."

With this astonishing speech the fur-pirate lowered himself into his own chair, facing Crawford, stuffed his pipe with the Virginia tobacco, and made a light. Crawford held himself in check, realizing in a flash the singular streak of superstition in his captor and resolving to see whither it tended. Nor did Deakin long delay in setting forth the matter, displaying a great confidence in himself, an assurance in his own deductions and suppositions.

"Fog's down again and the outer ice splitting up. If the wind hauls around into the east'ard, we'll be free soon enough now. Blood and wounds! A month we've been fighting this cursed ice. Now, Crawford, what's to do with ye? If the ice stops movin' to-night, I'll have that bark of yours. Come over and hang Moses Deakin, eh? Let 'em try it! If they come, you're here for hostage; if they come not, then ye lied to me and have a weak crew."

Shrewd reasoning enough, and Crawford was keenly

alarmed by it. Deakin leaned forward, clawed his great beard, grinned, and shot forth a direct question.

"So ye thought to sneak into the bay and steal the Star Woman from me, eh?"

"No."

"That's a lie. Ha! Put steel into me, will ye? I say again, that's a lie! South sea passage, eh? Ye knew well enough there was none. 'Twas the Star Woman ye wanted. I know when a man tells the truth, Crawford. It was a lie ye spoke about the south sea passage, and the truth about the green star. So ye were on your way to her, eh? There's wizardry in that, or ye'd never ha' found me on the ice. Aye, wizardry! And as ye said, the star brought ye here. It's a warlock ye are, no doubt about it."

Crawford was somewhat bewildered by all this, but the gaze of his captor settled and sobered him. Deakin sucked at his pipe, while his abnormally large eyes fastened upon his prisoner in a gaze that was oddly unwinking. Indeed, from time to time the lids, instead of drooping, lifted slightly and widened.

Once before had Crawford seen just such a stare as this, but then in the eyes of a woman. That was years ago in Ireland. He remembered the cold and rainy night, with Phelim Burke sitting across the campfire, and the old hag wandering in through the lines; the Wicklow Witch, they called her. He remembered how she had squatted by the fire, staring from him to Phelim Burke with that queer, momentary distending of her eyes; and she had talked of Granuaile and Red Hugh and Brian O'Rourke and others of the mighty dead, as though she knew them well. With

an effort, Crawford forced himself back to the present situation. He spoke quietly.

"Is this honest treatment of a guest, Moses Deakin? I came freely with you——"

"Sink you and your fine words!" The Bostonnais breathed deeply, his wide nostrils flaring, and removed the pipe to scratch at his two-pronged tangle of grizzled beard. He reverted at once to his own chosen subject.

"That French buccaneer, Frontin, gave ye news of her, and the star brought ye here. Ay, that'll be the way of it. I'll do ye no harm, Crawford, nor the star neither, for I'll need to walk carefully with warlocks, and can take no chances. A Cree wizard told me two year ago that no weapon or hand o' man could kill me, and that I'd come to my end only by the gift of a woman. So I ha' naught to do with women, unless it be the Star Woman. She always smiles at me, so I know she be right friendly and well-disposed."

He paused, puffing his pipe into a last flicker of life. Crawford gathered that in Deakin's thought he was something of a wizard, and was being treated to confidences. This thought drew the ghost of a smile to his lips. He racked his brains for some means of turning the fact to his advantage, but found none. Deakin was obviously wrapped up in his own fancies, which were sincere enough, and now went on with his rambling talk.

"So last year I sent messages to the Star Woman by the Injuns, bidding her come and meet me at my post this summer. Far away she is, somewhere to the south and west, but all the tribes know her name and fear it. Shall we have a look at her, Crawford? Ay, say ye so. I'll

have a smile from her sweet lips and tell ye what she's about this minute. Most like she's over on the other shore o' the bay now, waiting for me. She'll have had my message, sent from tribe to tribe until it reached her."

The giant laid aside his pipe. He shoved the heavy table so that it came under the arms of Crawford's chair and under Crawford's eye. Then, rising, he went to a locker and produced a shallow pewter dish. He set this on the table and reached down a flask, pouring into the dish a dankly glittering fluid which might have been black quicksilver, had there been such a thing. With the dish between himself and Crawford, Deakin now tugged his chair forward and reseated himself.

"First I'll have a look at what's in the straits," he said. "Put your eyes on the witch ink, Crawford, and tell me what ye see."

The Bostonnais stared down at the dark fluid, intent and absorbed, his huge frame bent over, his pronged beard sweeping the table, his immense hands outstretched and motionless. The monstrous incongruity of such a man engaged in so childish a task smote Crawford with a mad impulse to burst out laughing; but he checked it sternly enough. Whatever the man's delusion might be, it held a deadly sincerity. Also, Crawford had heard in Boston that this Moses Deakin was famed for seeing visions, and now he perceived the explanation of the rumours.

Crawford, being without any credulity and putting no faith in witchcraft or second sight, waited for what might come. It occurred to him that Deakin, if possessed of any desire to apply his magic, might well summon up a

vision of the *Northstar* at the moment, and save his scouts the work. Those who work wizardry, however, apparently eschew its more practical benefits.

"Look!" Deakin suddenly started, and his big hands gripped. "Blood and wounds—a fifty-gun ship!"

Crawford gazed down at the dark fluid and saw in it only the mirrored reflection of Deakin's hairy visage. The other man, however, spoke with growing excitement.

"White flag at her poop—a Frenchman! A ship o' the line, a royal ship! There's men aboard her; ay, the faces begin to come out now. What the Canadians doing aboard she? And a red Injun, and fine officers in gold lace. I'll warrant the rogues are cold enough! And yonder's her cap'n; a fine handsome man he is, and a boy alongside him, likely his brother——"

Crawford sent an astonished glance to the fluid, but saw nothing. Could Deakin really be finding visions there? That man and boy—they must be Iberville and Bienville! He remembered now that Iberville had been awaiting ships from France——

"It's Iberville!" he exclaimed. "Iberville and his fleet!"

That name, so dreaded on the bay, smote the Bostonians. Lifting his head, Deakin showed in wild and hairy countenance a sudden amazed awe. He thought Crawford, too, had seen the vision.

"Warlock, wi' the star at your breast—I knew it well enough!" he breathed hoarsely. "Iberville, is it? Then Moses Deakin goes not near the south o' the bay this voyage. Perdition take him and his Frenchmen! He be no man, but devil incarnate. Nay, I'll look no more at him, but shall call up the Star Woman. Set a name to her

likewise, if ye can; sink me, Crawford, if ye have not more power than I at my own game. Warlock, indeed!"

He lowered his face again and stared anew at the fluid.

Crawford, realizing now how the man was ridden by superstition, tried vainly to discover some trick in the matter, for he refused to believe that Deakin saw real images. Perhaps the man knew that a French squadron was heading north. Perhaps the whole thing was a lie and a delusion, either deliberate trickery or self-deception on Deakin's part. Perhaps there were no ships in the straits at all! That, indeed, was more likely than not.

"Now I see her!" cried out Deakin. "Look! She's standin' at the door of a bark lodge—blood and wounds, what a woman she is, too! White woman, too—gold hair streaming all over her, with a star o' blue stones on her breast——"

Deakin was concentrated, tense, quivering with inward excitement, completely gripped by his own fantasy. Crawford could not but feel the infection. He peered down, staring at the dish, yet seeing in it only the reflection of those distended grey eyes. Through his brain raced the words that Iberville had said to him, that evening above Bay de Verde. A Spanish woman——

"Ay, she's smiling at me! Put a name to her, ye warlock, if ye can!"

"Her name's Mariana," said Crawford.

Deakin caught his breath gustily, lifted wild eyes at Crawford, his wide nostrils flaring with each breath, his beard twitching; to doubt the terrible earnestness of the man was impossible.

Then came abrupt wakening, sudden and swift return

to sanity. From the dēck overhead sounded a medley of shouts and trampling feet, the rise of excited voices. Steps thumped on the ladder, and into the cabin came the boat-swain. Deakin looked at him with a growled oath.

"The men are back, master," said the man eagerly. "There's open water a half-mile outside of us—a wide channel. The ice ha' stopped moving outside and be jammed once more to the north'ard. Fog down like always, but the upper wind's hauling around. Looks like she'll be in east'ard before a great while, master."

Deakin stared at him a moment, then crashed out rapid orders.

"That means the ice be goin' fast. Get out the skids and chock the pinnace into 'em for haulin' across the ice. Lay food and powder in her, and muskets. Lay the little skiff overside likewise—we'll carry her across to open water."

"Be goin' to leave the ship?" came the astonished query.

"Ay, bouse. We be going to take Crawford's ship—gold aboard her! We'll work up to her i' the pinnace, take her, and be back afore morning. Leave the three men worst down wi' scurvy to hold the *Albemarle* and signal us. Ice won't go out afore turn o' the tide come morning. Sharp, now, sharp does it! We ha' no time to dilly away. Chuck me down a coil o' light line as ye go."

Bose disappeared. Moses Deakin returned the dark fluid to its flask, placed it with the dish in the locker, then turned and stared at Crawford.

"Two hundred pound for ye in Boston town!" His barrel of a chest heaved in a deep breath of resignation. "No, I'll take no chances. Two hundred pound is much

gold, but a warlock is not to be tampered with. I'll do ye no hurt, nor the star neither. None the less, I'll not leave ye free to shout."

A coil of line rattled down the ladder. Deakin picked it up, tore a piece of canvas from a dirty tarpaulin in one corner, and came to Crawford. The latter was firmly and efficiently gagged before he realized what was happening.

Deakin had thoroughly convinced himself that Crawford was something in the nature of a wizard, and that the emerald jewel was a thing of magic power. Only this obsession explained his reluctant decision to let the jewel go, not to mention the very valuable head of its bearer. That he should thus pass up two hundred pounds was an eloquent testimony to his sincerity. Crawford stirred uneasily in his bonds, wondering what was now about to take place.

"Our friend may have man's reason in the carcase of an animal," he reflected, "but so much the worse for him. If he had the brain of an animal, he'd be better off. If he doesn't mean to hurt me, what the devil does he mean? And why this gag?"

As though in response to this silent query, Deakin called down two of his men. They freed Crawford from the chair, then lashed his wrists together in front of him, and to the lashing attached a length of line. His feet were left free.

"All ready above?" inquired the Bostonnais.

"Ay, master."

"Then come ye with me, Crawford." Deakin took the length of line and went to the ladder, the captive perforce following him.

So they came out on deck, and Crawford was helped to climb over the side to the ice. There the crew were grouped about the longboat or pinnace, which was choked upon runners with ropes attached for pulling, and a tiny skiff which six of them picked up bodily. Three scurvy-staggering rascals bawled thin farewells from the rail above.

"Compass in pinnace, bouse?" asked Deakin. "Then come along to open water."

He marched in the lead, a huge, ungainly figure, with Crawford on the line behind him. The men followed, carrying the skiff and dragging the pinnace on its sled. Thick fog was settled down about the *Albemarle*, and in ten paces she was lost to sight behind them. Under that fog, all was dark; the slanting sunlight of the arctic summer's night was lost for a little while, ice and melted pools held obscure terror instead of fiery rainbow-hued splendour. Moses Deakin lifted his head, sniffed with his wide nostrils, and like an animal led straight for the open water which he could smell.

In this fashion half a mile was covered, the last of it being very precarious, since the floes were split into great cakes, while sharp cracks and reports told how further splitting was in progress. Then, abruptly, Deakin halted at the very edge of open water, swirling dark and ice-dotted as far as eye could pierce.

"Wind on the shift and ice be goin' out to-morrow," he announced, though Crawford could detect no faintest breath of breeze. "Launch the craft, now. Current settin' out—good! Into the skiff, Crawford."

Still far from realizing what was intended, Crawford

climbed into the skiff while the men held it to the verge of the floe. Deakin leaned over the little craft, which was empty of oars or anything else, and lashed the captive's lead-line about a thwart. Then he unsheathed his knife and tossed it into the bottom of the skiff, took the craft by her stern, and with one mighty heave sent her swirling out into the foggy water.

"By the time ye get yourself free, ye'll be safe enough!" came his roaring bellow. "And you're warlock enough to reach the shore. Fare ye well, Crawford! Now, lads, get matches lighted and into the pinnace with ye all! We're off for Crawford's bark——"

The fog closed in. Its chill was no worse than the chill in Crawford's heart as the swift currents bore his little skiff out into the bay.

Swept away into darkness almost immediately, he devoted all his energies to getting rid of the lashing about his arms. First he had to reach the knife, which was no simple task in itself; then, doubling over, gripping it between his feet, he must hack and saw at the line which bound him. The motion of the boat added to the difficulty, since the skiff was rocking against cakes of ice or rolling in sudden surges sent out from the welter of smashing floes and pans. The vast field of ice was now breaking up for good. The whole night was filled with a mighty diapason of the roaring masses, pierced by shriller notes of splitting floes and the occasional booming of an overturned berg.

During all this straining time, Crawford's mind did not dwell particularly upon his own fate, which seemed inevitable enough. By the gradual appearance of freer

water around, he knew that the currents were rapidly bearing him offshore, out into the vast inland sea, helpless to steer his craft or to hinder his destiny. Yet in this while, his thoughts reverted to two things—first to the Star Woman, second to that blood-stained paper which he had pressed into Frontin's hand on parting with his lieutenant.

He felt all amazed by Deakin's words regarding the Star Woman. The man had been indubitably sincere in believing that such a person existed; as he had said, Deakin must have heard of her through the Bay Indians. Iberville had heard of her, also. The very name, taken in conjunction with the emblem which lay on Crawford's breast, would have been impressive to a superstitious man; Crawford, however, was not superstitious. He was not impressed in the least by Deakin's ravings, but he was tremendously perplexed by this new recurrence of the Star Woman in his own destiny.

"Why not find her, then—why not?" he muttered. "Still, I have more pressing affairs in hand at the present moment, if I am to find anything except a watery grave. Will Frontin understand that paper, I wonder?"

The paper in question had been taken from the body of Moses Deakin's lieutenant. Crawford, in his hasty glance, had caught only the first line of writing, yet it now came back into his mind with redoubled emphasis. The words were simple: "Acct. of Goods to Bee broke out for ye trade att ye Daniche River." Wherever this Danish river might lie—the name was totally unknown to Crawford—there also must be Deakin's secret trading rendezvous with the redskins. What a chance!

"Ah, free!" he exclaimed, when at last his arms were at liberty and he could chafe his numbed and swollen hands into life. "Now, if I had but a sail and a chart of this bay, I'd still best that hairy devil. Warlock, am I? Ha—a breeze! To work, warlock!"

A faint breath of wind fanned his cheek. There was no lift to the fog, which rolled down more thick and dark than ever, nor was the little breeze likely to rift it. Crawford, facing the situation, found himself in total ignorance of direction. If the breeze came from the east, as Deakin had said, he would be carried off the land. He had no food or water, no blankets or sail; he had only the clothes on his back, the naked knife, and the light line which had captured him.

With these things, he went to work.

Despite the bitter chill of the fog, he was forced to dispense with his outer fur-lined coat. Then he smashed the 'midships thwart of the boat and split the long plank lengthwise until he had sticks to serve his purpose. These he fitted and spliced together with unravelled hemp, until he had a stout six-foot mast. Another stick in the arms of the coat made a very fair dipping-lug rig. To get this rig installed was another matter. Eventually, however, he had the mast stayed in place, got up his makeshift sail, made fast the lines, and chuckled softly as he felt the faint breeze take hold. He lay across the thwarts and heard the water go rippling more swiftly past the counter.

"Warlock indeed!" he commented, with a laugh. "The Star of Dreams is still guiding, and whither the star goes, I follow. It may well be that there is some truth behind all this rank superstition—singular, how Deakin spoke of

the Star Woman! Coincidence in the names, of course—yet I wonder!”

He laughed again at the fancy, but quickly sobered. Crawford himself was tempted to be a trifle superstitious about that emerald star. First he had taken it as a symbol of his own flight from the world, of his quest after a freedom that did not exist. From talking of it with Frontin or Sir Phelim Burke, a reaction had inevitably taken effect upon his own mind. He fought against this and scorned it, yet none the less it lingered. Consequently, Deakin's belief in a connection between star and Star Woman made an appeal to him—until he forced himself to dismiss the whole thing as the wanderings of an unsound brain, the superstitious fancy of a bestial man.

“The Danish river!” he reflected, coming back again to his immediate problems. “If I knew where that place lay, and had food, I believe I'd try for it——”

He was now out of the ice and distinctly warmer, the breeze was freshening slightly, the fog was somewhat less dense. So, careless whither he was carried, he found the boat's bottom to be sound and dry, and promptly curled up for a much-needed sleep.

Morning came and he slept on, while the long wraiths of grey fog fled across the waters and thinned into shadows, and the wind came ever fresher and steadier out of the southeast to scatter the dissipating mist and blow the skiff out to north and west. Behind her the morning broadened, and overhead the fog gave place to blue sky, although the sun itself remained dun and dim behind the heavy wrack of grey obscurity that still overhung the straits and the Labrador coast. Ahead in the west, how-

ever, the fog went whirling away and was gone, until presently the sunlight struck all the wide expanse of sea into glittering radiance, with the enormous granite cliffs of Mansfield island forming a long blur against the western horizon. Off to the east and north the ice blink made shimmering response to the sunlight, and from the straits came the thunderous rumble and grind of ice-masses fighting for freedom beneath the fog-blanket.

Crawford awakened. He sat up, blinking at the sunlight, then stared at the running white crests all around, and laughed in sudden joyous remembrance.

"I'll whip you yet, Moses Deakin!" he cried out exultantly. "No food, no rudder, no sail, no compass—yet I'll whip you, sink me if I don't! Ay, warlock or not, I may give you a fight—for the—Star——"

The words died on his lips as he swung about and swept his eager gaze along the horizon. For there, not a mile to the northeast and standing squarely for him out of the cloud-bank that still hovered low above the straits, was a fifty-gun ship—white canvas towering up into the sky as she leaned over and headed for him across the wind! Crawford stared at her all agape, incredulous, then leaped to his feet with a blaze of excitement in his blue eyes. The French ship! Iberville! As he stood, thus, leaning to the thrust of the boat and staring, the emerald jewel came out from beneath his shirt; he replaced it with fumbling fingers, and a laugh broke on his lips.

"The Star of Dreams, eh? There lies the ship Deakin saw in his vision, and it seems that I'm destined to meet Iberville again. Did Deakin see the Star Woman also?"

He had no answer to this query, but meet Iberville he

did, half an hour later, when he clambered up the side of the *Pelican* frigate and struck hands with the eldest of the famous Le Moyne brethren. Young Bienville, boy in years yet wearing man's uniform, stood beside Iberville, and greeted Crawford with a cry and a hearty embrace.

"I knew it was you! Pierre scoffed at me, but I knew it!"

Crawford laughed into the ardent eyes of the handsome youngster, then turned to the strong and masterful brother, who welcomed him with equal warmth.

"My faith, it's incredible!" said Iberville. "Why are you here alone in an open boat, M. Crawford? Where's that bark you had from me?"

"Lay the tale on the shoulders of food, drink and tobacco, and it'll go better," replied Crawford. Instantly Iberville took his arm and led him aft, with hasty apologies, while the ship's yards were squared and she fell off on her course. Crawford's gaze took in the staring Rochefort marines, the clustered seamen, the groups of Canadians; then he was being introduced to the officers—Grandville of the marines, and La Salle, the wild bush-loper Martigny, who had raided Acadia and Newfoundland with Iberville, the royal commissioner La Potherie, and others.

Now, knowing his man, Iberville led Crawford down to the cabin and shut out all save Bienville. Then, with food and wine before him, Crawford began to relate what had happened since his meeting and parting with the Le Moynes in Newfoundland. In the midst, there came a wild hammering at the door. In burst a red-haired, cas-socked figure who greeted Crawford with a huge yell of joy and gripped his shoulders affectionately.

"Hal Crawford—by the piper! I was below with a poor dyin' devil and——"

"Fitzmaurice of Kerry!" exclaimed Crawford. "Why, this is a dream——"

"Lad, lad, it's like old times to see ye!" burst out Fitzmaurice, chaplain of the fleet. "Dost remember Limerick town, and the hammerer in the breach, and Phelim Burke na Murtha, and how Dutch William's men poured in on us——"

"Phelim's here on the bay!" cried Crawford. Then Iberville laughed, slammed the door shut again, and intervened.

"Sit down, Fitzmaurice, or I'll send you back to shrive more scurvy-sick men! Let the man talk. Crawford, give me the news I crave! Have you met English ships in the straits? Have you seen any but this Bostonnais you were mentioning?"

"None," rejoined Crawford. "Where's the rest of your fleet?"

Iberville shrugged. "How do I know? Ahead of us, we believe. We've been fighting the ice for weeks. The last I saw of the others was two days ago. My brother Serigny was far ahead of us in the *Palmier*. The *Profound*, under Du Guai, was almost at open water, and the *Wasp* likewise. We left the *Violent* at Placentia for repairs. We had news that an English fleet was on the way, but have seen nothing of them."

The excited Irish chaplain settled down, Crawford swallowed his wine and lighted a pipe, and all four men fell into talk. Iberville, avid for news, was confident that his brother Serigny and the other three ships were already steering across the bay for Fort Nelson, at which post he

meant to strike the first blow. When he had heard Crawford's tale, he nodded.

"Strange words! Did this Bostonnais really see anything in the dish? My faith, I'd like to know! So you've given up the south sea passage, Crawford? Art going to find the Star Woman?"

Crawford shook his head. "I know not, Iberville—my first hope shall be to find my friends and ship again. Time enough for that."

"Ay, we'll have news of them, never fear!" Iberville rose. "Rest assured, you shall have your ship again and the best charts we can give you. M. l'Abbé, I offered this roving rascal a commission if he would sail with me—and he refused. Yet behold, here he is! Is this the hand of providence or not?"

"I'd call it Hal Crawford's luck!" said Fitzmaurice, with a chuckle. "But where to, Pierre? Sit down, man, and smoke a pipe——"

"I must lay out the course and watch the charts," said Iberville. "These pilots are afraid of the ice and shallows. Have out your talk in peace."

He departed. Bienville, leaning across the table with his eyes ashine, listened eagerly while Crawford and the chaplain conned the days that had elapsed since Limerick and Boynewater. Once Crawford turned to him gaily.

"And suppose we find the English fleet ahead of us, Bienville?"

The boy shrugged. "Ask Pierre! We've put some of our guns and thirty seamen aboard the *Profound*, and twoscore of our men are down below with scurvy. But

we'll not find the enemy ahead of us. Pierre is always the first, never fear!"

So the *Pelican* drove on to her destiny, while men laughed and made merry aboard her at thought of the green land so near, nor dreamed to what doom they rushed so merrily. And, while she drove on, strange things were taking place behind her at the mouth of the straits, where the curtains of fog still lingered and blew away and returned again.

Strange things, indeed, and stranger sounds echoing back from these ironbound cliffs than any they had yet heard since man came to these seas. For there the flash of cannon split the fog, and the crashing thunder of broadsides boomed back from the headlands. When the thick mist lifted for a space that morning, the *Profound* was fast nipped in the ice, with three unsuspected English frigates about her stern; whereupon, as the terse chronicler puts it, "Du Guai attacked." Hour after hour he fought the three with his two little stern-guns, hour after hour they poured their shot into him, until the fog closed down again and they deemed him sunk, and the roaring cliffs fell silent.

There, too, before this fight happened, Moses Deakin had fallen upon fate and found it bitter to the taste. Before the dawn came, he sighted the flare of a ship in the ice, and drove his men at her. He thought her Crawford's bark, but she was something else—the *Hudson's Bay*, crowded with extra seamen and servants of the English company, and in command of her was grim old Nick Smithsend, who hanged fur-pirates and Frenchmen alike. The end of this matter was that Moses Deakin and half

his Boston men sat in irons to await hanging at Nelson, and the other half of them lay dead upon the ice.

And there, too, but farther south under the cliffs, Frontin and Sir Phelim Burke and their men fell upon the corvette *Albemarle* in the dawning. None too soon either, for the floes and shore ice were breaking up beneath their feet. Deakin's three scurvy-smitten men fought them and were cut down. One of these, before he died, related the fate that had befallen Crawford. Then fell Frontin to work like a madman, and all of them likewise. Presently the *Albemarle* was working out through ice-channels, until she gained open water with the early light of day and tacked back and forth through the mist while the guns roared to the northward. No sign of Crawford's little skiff did they find, however.

So they, who no less than Moses Deakin had their destiny to accomplish, tacked down to the southward that day and then back again, seeking vainly. And at set of sun, when the fog lifted for a little space, there suddenly loomed through the greyness a huge shape, and a gun thundered in air above them, and over the puny, frightened corvette frowned the heavy batteries of Serigny in the *Palmier*. The Frenchmen came aboard and took her. Frontin, cursing bitterly, shook his fist at the fog and blasphemed like the buccaneer he was, as the ship was headed to the west and south. Then came storm that night, and the pilots were ignorant of the bay; and the ships drove blindly before the wind.

Thus did fate, working through the activities of little men, lay out a blood-red net in which to snare heroes. And Iberville, all unwitting, bore up for Fort Nelson.

CHAPTER III

CONFIRMING A BELIEF IN MIRACLES

ON this early night of September there was gaiety aboard the *Pelican*. She lay anchored ten miles southwest of Fort Nelson, in the open bay. Upon reaching the river the previous day, she found all buoys destroyed and the channel-marks removed, so that Iberville dared not attempt the precarious river entrance, across the wide mud flats, until he had taken soundings. The bay charts and pilots were all with Serigny, as were the supplies and siege guns, and he was bitterly disappointed not to find his other three ships here ahead of him. At least he had beaten the English squadron, however.

So Martigny and a score of Canadians departed in the pinnace to take soundings, scout the fort, and roam the woods in search of friendly Indians, and that evening high celebration was held aboard ship. The guns were shifted, battle lanterns hung about, all hands made merry. There were fiddles, with a flute or two to help, and no lack of good wine all around. French and Canadians sang chansons and Mohawk chants and gay sentimental court ballads, officers and men intermingling in Latin good-fellowship, voyageur and chevalier dancing and drinking together, Iberville joining hands with his powder boys.

Crawford, who took small part in all this gaiety, tired of looking on and presently went up into the bows. He

stood there smoking, his eyes watching the play of lights in the northern sky that fought the dim, sunny twilight in the south. There Iberville found him presently, when he strolled up with La Potherie, and clapped him heartily on the shoulder.

"What, dreaming of stars? Come and try our excellent Canary. To-morrow Martigny will return with the pin-nace, we'll land guns and men, and crack this nut of Nelson. Ha! Art thinking of the Star Woman, eh?"

"Admitted. The name lingers. Do you know more of her than Perrot told?"

"Nay, Perrot is the only white man who has ever seen her."

Here Bacqueville de la Potherie struck in with avid interest. He was the avowed historian of the expedition, and was eager to learn of all things, while his open curiosity, his frankness and intelligence, endeared him to every one alike.

"Tell me about this Perrot—I have heard of him before this. And the Star Woman——"

Iberville obliged, and concluded with a laugh, "So, you see, our friend Crawford may yet set forth into the wilderness to seek her! Eh, Crawford? Why so gloomy, man?"

"Why so merry?" Crawford smiled. "It may be that I shall seek her. Who knows? I'm not gloomy, but your gay scene is not for me. I'm looking over the horizon."

"You'll die of that looking, one day."

"Ay. And how better?"

Iberville nodded soberly, his spirit perfectly comprehending that of Crawford.

"How better, indeed? There's blood of mine in those dark forests ashore. My brother Chateauguay lies under the pickets of that fort, which I have taken once or twice ere this, and shall take again. Well, I fight for my king while you fight for a dream—and devil shrive me if I'd not like to seek the Star Woman with you! Don't look too long at those lights in the sky—ah, but you should see them in winter, as I have seen them from yonder shores! Some say they foretell storm in summer. The Indians call them the spirits of dancing dead men. Faith, there'll be dead men dancing ashore once I get a mortar to bear on that accursed fort behind its cloak of trees! Come, Bacqueville, leave our man of destiny to dream——"

The other two departed, and Crawford presently went to the cabin which he shared with Fitzmaurice of Kerry. In ten minutes he was sound asleep to the whine of fiddles and the soft throatings of flutes.

It was broad daylight when he wakened to a great tumult of trampling feet on the decks, mingled with roars of joyous shouts and exultant oaths. The chaplain burst in upon him and in furious delight dragged him bodily from his berth.

"Up and on deck, ye sluggard! Here the fleet's in sight—Serigny's come at last, and we're standing out to meet 'em! Up, ye lazy divil!"

Crawford flung on his clothes hastily enough. When he got on deck, he found the *Pelican* heading out for the open bay, where three distant sail were leaning down the wind. The air had turned bitter cold overnight and storm was brewing in the grey sky, but who cared for

that? Serigny was sighted, the long voyage was ended in triumph, a stroke at Nelson would be made ere set of sun! Out stood the ship to welcome her comrades, gay flags decking her spars, and Grandville's gunners unstopping cannon for a salute of welcoming.

Gaining the high poop-deck by the helm, where Iberville stood with his brother, Crawford joined the group of officers there. Signals were run up, and Iberville raised a glass to scrutinize the approaching ships. Then Crawford saw his eyes widen, saw him lower the glass, saw a sudden deadly pallor creeping into his cheeks. For one instant Iberville stood thus as though paralyzed, then turned and quietly touched the arm of La Potherie.

"Bacqueville, order food served out at once—swiftly! Then take charge of the forecastle; I'll send the Canadians to you. Bienville, how many men aboard fit for service?"

"A hundred and twoscore, Pierre," returned the boy carelessly. "Forty sick below, a score gone with Martigny in the pinnacle—"

"Go below. Tell Grandville and La Salle to clear the lower deck for action. You'll take the upper tier with De Ligondez. Why the devil didn't Martigny come back last night—we've not men enough to man the guns! Here, sergeant!" A Rochefort marine saluted. "Have handropes stretched along the decks—ice is forming already, I see. Order the magazines opened. St. Martin! Get every Canadian to the forecastle instantly, under La Potherie, with fusils and fresh horns of powder, and serve out bullets. Swiftly, swiftly! Roundshot on deck, there!"

At these rapid and impetuous orders, every eye was fastened on Iberville in stupefied amazement. From the masthead now rang down a sharp cry.

"No signals answered!"

Silence came upon the ship, a dread and terrible silence of horrified incredulity, of dismayed consternation—until a Canadian gave voice to the sharp, yelping war whoop of the Mohawks. Then all beheld tiny flecks of scarlet break out from the three ships bearing down the wind, and the white smoke of a gun jetted from the foremast.

Not Serigny—but the enemy!

"You'll run out to sea?" Crawford turned to Iberville. The latter smiled grimly, his eyes flitting over the ship, not answering for a moment.

Here mad activity was leaping forth—gunners stripping, boys on the run with powder and shot, ports slamming open, ropes being stretched for hand-hold, guns being unstopped. Spray was forming into ice as it fell. Iberville turned and silently swept his arm in three directions. This threefold gesture included the shore to the north, the long stretches of shallows and reefs to west and south—and to the eastward the open sea where the three English ships foamed down the wind.

"Why run, when one must fight?" said Iberville briefly. "Stand by the helm, my friend, for I'll have need of your quick eye and hand there! The *Pelican* goes forward."

Go forward she did, with the crash of a gun to echo the words.

It meant something that Iberville was a captain in the royal navy, in a day when ensigns commanded brigs, lieutenants sailed frigates, and captains manœuvred fleets.

Against him were three ships, each of them alone a fair match for the crippled *Pelican*, and four veteran commanders of the English company who knew every foot of the uncharted waters.

During three and a half hours Iberville fought them with his seamanship, while his lieutenants fought them with small arms and great, and the guns thundered. The tactics of the English never varied. They had Iberville where they wanted him—far outnumbered, cut off from flight, with treacherous shoals reaching from the land for miles to entrap him. Again and again they tried to force him in upon the shallows; again and again he evaded the trap, tacking back and forth, taking their hurricane of shot as he slipped past, while his own guns roared unceasingly. Ball and grape screamed through his rigging, for their great intent was to dismast and cripple and pound him into submission. As fast as a line was shot away, the seamen were up and repairing it, and ever Iberville kept just out of their reach, kept off the shoals, kept giving back broadside for broadside.

The wind was freshening fast, the cold was growing more intense, threat of snow was in the air. On the fore-castle clustered the dark Canadians, half naked and painted to the waist, joining musketry and Mohawk whoop to the din; La Salle and Grandville fought the lower-deck guns, young Bienville the upper tier after Chevalier de Ligondez was struck down. From every hand iron and lead were smashing into the devoted *Pelican*, until her decks were red with frozen blood as she tacked and wore, and the handlines were crimson-dripping streaks; yet ever she evaded the shoals. Fitzmaurice of

Kerry tended a gun or knelt beside a dying man indifferently, and from the tall figure of Iberville shot swift and cool orders to Crawford, who helped swing the great rudder of the doomed ship. Doomed she was, as every man there knew ere the fight was an hour gone, yet in the furious exultancy of battle none cared.

Solid shot and grape and musketry they poured into her, and she gave back shot and grape and ball—but each time a little less swiftly, as her gunners died, and scurvy-smitten scarecrows staggered up from below to drag weakly at the guns. Foot by foot, it seemed, she was driven back, cornered and hemmed in, the three ships bearing around her like wolves around a stag at bay. Noon came and passed, but none thought of food. Crawford, following the anxious looks of Iberville, saw the storm-clouds sweeping blackly down, knew the wind was thickening, swung the helm grimly. Then, suddenly, from Iberville burst one shrill and frightful yell.

“Wear, Crawford, wear—for the love of the saints, wear——”

Crawford flung himself to help the St. Malo man at the helm. There upon them was bearing the *Hampshire*, driving full down the wind with obvious intent to ram and sink the battered *Pelican*. A huge ship was the *Hampshire*, a royal navy ship new and stoutly built, and Fletcher was on her quarterdeck. He had Iberville to reckon with, however, and he failed in his stroke, and Crawford saw him shaking his fist and cursing in furious rage as he lost the weather-gauge and was evaded.

With this, the two ships ran down the wind yard to yard, so close that boarders gathered in readiness, so close that

bulwarks almost touched at every sea, so close that English and French answered curse with curse, grenade with grenade—while the great guns thundered in broadsides that left each ship rocking and reeling and staggering down the rolling seas. Fletcher would not be first to draw off, nor would Iberville; so the guns roared, and men died, until a last crashing broadside sent the *Pelican* up into the wind with half her rigging cut away and more than half the men in her waist mowed down by a storm of grape. In this moment she was theirs for the taking.

But there was none to take her.

Crawford, struck down by a splinter, was dragged to his feet by the shrill, terrible scream of dying men. He looked for the enemy ship, and saw only a welter of shattered masts and rigging; like a sounding whale she had plunged bodily, was gone all in an instant, down until she staggered upon the shallows and lay quiet with only her topmasts above water, and wounded men shrieking as they drowned.

“Hard over!” shouted Iberville, and leaped to the helm. “At them, Bienville—fire!”

Once more the guns crashed out, and now for the last time. As Iberville swooped upon her, the *Hudson’s Bay* reeled up into the wind and lowered flag and foresail. The *Dering*, not waiting to face the Frenchman alone, shook out her reefed sails and went scudding away through the whistling tempest for Fort Nelson and safety.

Iberville groaned as his gaze swept the red-frozen deck, while his ship bore down upon Nick Smithsend’s crippled frigate. Then he was at the helm, once more in action.

“Take fifteen Malouins and board her as we touch,

Crawford! Swiftly! I must away to catch the *Dering*—swiftly, swiftly! Get her into the river if ye can——”

Crawford leaped into the bloody waist, while Iberville's voice sent some St. Malo seamen to join him. The two ships came staggering and reeling together, and grapnels were flung out. Crawford jumped across the shattered rails, the men trailing after. Somehow all scrambled aboard, the irons were flung off, and the shattered *Pelican* went lurching away in pursuit of Grimington and the fleeing *Dering*.

Here on the prize Crawford stood aghast. The ship was torn to ribbons alow and aloft. He found dying men, blood freezing in pools, screams and curses of wounded resounding. Smithsend came up to him, bitterly enough, and started at Crawford's English words.

“Your parole, cap'n? Good. I'm to take you into the river if possible.”

“More like into hell,” growled Smithsend. “Rudder's gone, we're half full of water, not men enough alive to man a tier of guns——”

As something touched his face, Crawford looked up and saw a drift of white snowflakes breaking down the wind like a silver cloud.

“Run in beside the wreck of your frigate and anchor, and get the pumps to working,” he said, and ordered his men to help the English seamen.

Groping her way, the wounded ship slowly reeled in toward the shallows and dropped anchor, still miles off the land. There was no help to be given the crew of the *Hampshire*; these had vanished under the icy water, to the last man. Crawford met with no opposition as he

took over the ship, for the English were dazed, stunned, unable to realize how they had been beaten and broken by a single ship. Gradually they recovered, fell to work wearily enough, taking up the new fight to save their ship and their lives.

While some patched up the gaping holes below and got the ports closed again, others labored getting the pumps into action. Crawford, seeking for wounded, crawled into the forepeak with a man to hold a lantern. And, as the light was held up, he gazed into the snarling features of Moses Deakin. Astounded, he saw that Deakin was not only in irons, but was half buried under the shot-torn bodies of other men in irons, while a horrible sound of groaning came out of the darkness around. Crawford's face showing in the lantern-light, a great cry burst from Deakin.

"Crawford! Blood and wounds—be it you or not?"

Crawford made no response. Leaving his men to care for the wounded, he turned and went back on deck. He sought out Smithsend and discovered to his amazement how Deakin had come to be aboard; for the present, however, he let things bide as they were in the face of more important matters, hoping that the situation would become no worse for all of them.

Vain hope! Hours later, the shot-riven *Pelican*, having failed to catch the *Dering*, came tacking back in the driving snowstorm and anchored alongside the prize. Iberville demanded pilotage into the river, but stout Smithsend, who had flung his charts and directions overboard, refused point-blank. Iberville now managed to sling a mortar aboard the prize, with a few marines, bidding

Crawford get into the river if he could; for by this time there was no doubt whatever as to the issue. It was *sauve qui peut!*

The storm had settled into a howling tempest out of the northeast, which precluded any hope of beating off the land, and with night the sea was rising in huge billows sweeping down the full length of the bay. Hawser after hawser parted. In vain Crawford and Smithsend tried to keep the rudderless ship where she was. From the wounded men came low shrieks of utter despair as the frigate went staggering blindly down the wind, ice forming over everything, snow hiding the foamy seas from sight, nothing to be seen in the gloom but the faces of unburied dead men peering horribly through shrouds of ice.

In vain did they try to steer with booms or oars. It was a night of horror, with naught to be done save to work the pumps and hope for the best, as the weight of ice dragged her more heavily down by the nose and she drifted aimlessly and without direction. A little after midnight, Crawford crawled down to where Moses Deakin lay, and after unlocking the man's irons gave him the keys.

"If any of your men be alive, set them loose. I can't leave you here to drown like rats. Come up above, get some food, and lend a hand with the pumps."

Then Crawford was back on deck again, where Smithsend was trying to fashion a jury rudder from the smashed spars aloft.

Toward morning the ship struck heavily, but wrenched free, passed over the shoal, and drove on. With daylight the storm was whirling down worse than ever, huge waves

bursting over the whole ship, water gaining on the pumps, every man reeling with weariness and utter exhaustion. During a lull in the tempest, Crawford peered off to starboard and saw a dim shape rolling sternfirst before the wind, and knew that the *Pelican* was plunging to her doom. The brazen voice of Moses Deakin thundered at his ear.

"She's driving on the middle shoal—she'll strike, and the land six mile away! We're well outside. Pray to your star now, Crawford! We'll go ashore twenty mile farther down the coast."

Both ships were indeed lost, since the shores were miles distant and guarded by long shallows, all the small boats were shot away, and with every moment the weight of new ice was bearing the bows deeper into the water. So they drove on, and any thought of enmity betwixt French and English was forgotten, death being close upon all alike. Fur-pirates and company servants and French marines huddled together or worked at the pumps in dismal despair.

With afternoon came more snow, hiding all the shores ahead. Crawford was at work in the icy bows, trying to chop loose a spare anchor, when suddenly he and his men were sent all asprawl on the ice, grasping at the hand-lines, hurled headlong. With a hideous lurch and shudder, the doomed ship struck, lifted, and struck again.

Crawford saw the masts topple, heard the crash of splintered wood above the roar of the storm, and then was swept overboard with the tangle of masts and spars and rigging. And this, for the moment, was the end of everything so far as Crawford was concerned. After a little he

revived, gasping, and managed to lash himself to the litter of wreckage, but passed again into oblivion.

If Crawford was gone, however, Moses Deakin remained; and if ever a man made use of his head with certain death on all sides, that man was the Bostonnais. He had survived a perilous trade these many years by just such ability. He knew well that no mercy awaited him either from French or English—and Deakin acted accordingly. Receiving no mercy, he was not the man to accord mercy.

The ship was sogged into the shallows with her bows under water, waist and high stern exposed and beginning to break up fast as the thunderous rollers burst above her. All was confusion, flying spray, screams of the wounded as they washed away. On the poop, Smithsend was knocking together a raft to float some of the hurt men ashore. The land was at least three miles distant, but was quite hidden behind snow and obscurity. So far as Deakin was concerned, the land was as perilous as the bay, but he had no choice and so acted swiftly.

His brazen voice gathered three of his surviving men, and with these he made his way to the waist of the ship. There under the flying spray three seamen were at work, desperately trying to loosen the two halves of the broken mainyard, which had smashed through the bulwarks and wedged there. Deakin leaped upon the three and struck them aside, his men knocked them into the surging tide below. Whirling, Deakin spat orders at his own three.

“Go get some food, a fusil, and dry powder—sharp about it! Strip some tarpaulin off the guns below and fetch it. Move fast, blast ye! She’s breakin’ up.”

Breaking up she was. Wounded men were going to leeward, clinging to bits of wreckage, swimming frantically in the icy water, pulling each other down. The Bostonnais hurled himself at the two fragments of the great spar lodged in the bulwarks. His immense strength prised them free, he tore at other flotsam, stood guard over it all until one by one his three men came staggering back to the spot with their burdens. One bore food and a fusil, another had powder and ball and pistols, the third brought tarred canvas.

Deakin sent them after line, and got the powder, weapons and food all firmly lashed inside roll after roll of the tarpaulin. Then the four men flung to work at the spars and wreckage, and in ten minutes accomplished more than the green hands with Smithsend on the poop could effect in an hour's time. They were seasoned men, knowing what fate faced them unless they gripped at the forelock of destiny—therefore they grasped hard and sure, without pity.

They got the little raft into the water, loaded their precious burden aboard, and caught hold of the lines on each side. She floated high. Next moment men were around them, pleading, yelling, fighting for a shred of the visible hope. Moses Deakin, towering above them with a jagged splinter of rail of his hand, struck them down. His voice boomed, and they were off, all four men swimming, drifting inshore with the wind and current.

Still other men came clustering about, dark figures pouring out of the broken wreck as ants pour forth from a burning log. Wounded men, company servants and seamen, one or two Frenchmen; Deakin and his men

silently watched them come, then struck out grimly and mercilessly, beat off the hapless refugees, kept their raft ever pushing ahead over the shallows, leaving in their wake a mournful wail of despairing voices that followed them down the wind. The four quickly overtook and passed the first stragglers, resolutely shoved onward, pausing only to smite down one or two who sought the help of their float. Thus they had covered nearly a mile when Deakin uttered a relieved grunt.

"Shoal! Down feet."

They let themselves down, found the water shoulder-high, presently only waist-high. At this level it remained for another two miles, and they dragged the float by the lines. Moses Deakin was in the lead, bent over, straining at the ropes with his immense strength, nostrils flaring as he sniffed the shore. Soon this came into sight ahead, the low ground dark with trees. In twenty minutes the four men were carrying their burdens up from the water, staggering through snow and shore-ice up to the line of trees, where they sank down in absolute exhaustion.

"No time to waste here," panted the *Bostonnais*, gazing into the storm and wiping the spray from his face, his great beard heaving above his chest. "We're seven or eight leagues east o' Nelson. No use goin' west—such o' them fools as gets ashore will all head that way."

"Then where the devil do we head for—New Severn?" demanded one of the three rogues, ironically.

"Ay, New Severn."

"The English company hath a gallows there, master."

Deakin glared from bloodshot eyes at the objector. Then, realizing the need for patience, he stooped and drew

with his finger in the sand a rough right angle, indicating the line of the shore to the west.

"Now look 'ee! We be forty league south o' Danish river. How be we to get there? Not by walking, wi' the woods full o' French and English dogs! Besides, by the shore 'tis more like eighty leagues than forty. Therefore, turn toward Severn. Ye fool, we may not have a mile to go! We'll find redskins anywhere about here, at the first creek we come by, and Injun canoes too. They're all down at the coast for the trade, them that don't live here. Follow the coast east and we'll come on 'em, certain. Then we ha' the tarpaulins for sails to our canoe. Blood and wounds! Get a canoe and head north—what better d'ye want? Canoe can go over the shallows—French ships must go six leagues out to sea to find a draft o' seven fathom! D'ye get it in your thick head?"

"Ay, master——"

"Keep it there, then." Deakin knocked the man sprawling and leaped to his feet. "Shanks' mare and away! The storm be falling by to-night, most like."

The four men rose and went lurching off along the edge of the trees, following the low line of the shore and keeping their eyes open for the first sign of a creek. Half frozen though they were, they dared not linger here to light a fire.

Meanwhile, with the strong set of currents bearing it eastward along the coast, all the tangled top-hamper of the wreck drifted away, and in the midst of it was Crawford. So it happened that the four men, staggering onward by the shore, came upon this tangle of lines and spars, grounded upon a shallow.

Crawford was alive and awake by this time, but there was scarce enough life in his brain to admit any impressions; his body was quite helpless, sodden garments fast frozen to the maintop that held him above water, and waves still breaking over him. None the less, he dimly comprehended that there was clear sunlight overhead, and that the tempest was over. So he was not dead after all! Not dead, yet not far from it; and evidently dreaming, since there dimly pierced to his senses, as though from some great distance, the brazen tones of Moses Deakin.

"What, ye will not? Blood and wounds, but I say ye shall! Into the water, all of ye! In, and haul him ashore. But for him ye'd be frozen stark in irons this minute, ye rogues; and Moses Deakin pays tit for tat. Move sharp, or I'll bash your lousy heads!"

Crawford tried to see who spoke, but his feeble gaze could comprehend only ice and water. The spars and wreckage surged. Then in front of him he beheld a fragment of jagged wood upflung, and it came toppling at him, nor could he move a muscle to avoid it. Down it came, crashed him across the head and forced him under the water, and again his eyes closed and he knew no more.

After this, he had a strange vision. A delicious pain ran through his whole body as warmth crept into it, and soft fingers of women were dressing his hurts, and he was sipping hot broth. He saw around him strange dark faces which he took for Indians. Not the redskins he had known in New York, but flatter-faced people, lacking the pride and fierceness of the Iroquois, sloven with dirt. Then all this drifted away again on the wings of sleep.

With his next awakening, however, Crawford was him-

self in mind if not in body, and though his head was heavily bandaged, his senses were clear enough. He awoke to warmth, and sunlight flooding above sparkling wave-crests, and the slow rise and fall and surge of a craft under sail. He perceived that he was sitting propped up amidships in a long canoe; behind his shoulders was a pole, to either end of which was lashed a bit of plank. These planks went down into the water on each side of the canoe, acting in place of centreboard. The craft was speeding forward under a good breeze, was heading to the north, and her sail was made from patched tarpaulin. Two men, at first strangers to Crawford, were lying asleep in the bow; but presently he recognized them for two of Moses Deakin's men. From behind him sounded the rumbling tones of Deakin himself, conversing with another.

"Ay, that's the wreck of Iberville's ship down yonder. She's a good two leagues off the land, and the same from the fort. Smoke i' the trees means that some o' them have got safe ashore, plague blister them!"

"We'd ha' better chance for life with them than i' the wilderness," grumbled the unseen man. "What be the use o' making Danish river, Master? Injuns won't be there this time o' year, and we have no ship."

"How know ye that, ye rogue?" snapped Deakin fiercely, then laughed. "No Injuns? Wait and see. If they ha' word for me from the Star Woman, they'll be there waiting. As for the ship, we left three men aboard her. Soon's the ice let her free, they'd bring her across the bay to our old place. We have only to wait. And if

they come not, what then? Why, make the best of it! Blood and wounds, can we not winter with the redskins? Or we can come south again after the fighting's done and take a craft from one o' the forts. As for that, the Star Woman herself may well be waiting to meet me, as I bade her! Hark—ay, that devil Iberville is safe ashore! Hear the great gun from the fort, eh? Likely Iberville is hammering at the gate with his naked fists."

The dull note of a distant cannon rolled to them from the distant forested shore.

So it was no dream, and he was alive! Crawford relaxed and closed his eyes again. He could realize that Moses Deakin had saved him, could dimly grasp that it had been done to repay his own act in setting the Bostonnais free. He could even figure out to some extent all that had passed, since Deakin was now heading for the Danish river. But nothing mattered. Weariness returned upon him, and despite the hunger gnawing at his vitals, he fell back into slumber.

Then oaths and wild curses, with a brazen roar of maniacal fury from Moses Deakin, wakened him some time afterwards and brought him wide-eyed. The four men in the canoe were pouring forth a storm of bitter imprecations, which for once were sincerely heartfelt. Crawford, seeing the men in the bow shaking fists to starboard, turned his head.

There, far out beyond the shallows that hedged the whole low coast, he descried the white sails of three tall ships heading to the southward, and a little behind them the brown canvas of a corvette. This, as the raging curses

of his companions informed him, was no other than the *Albemarle*. Presently the distant roll of a cannon reached them, and another.

"Ay, they've seen us, and much good it'll do them. The French ha' got our ship, eh?" Moses Deakin faced the issue squarely. "Never mind that, lads, never mind! On to the Danish, and we'll find the redskins waiting for us. We'll find the Star Woman there too, or a message from her. They'll be sure to wait all summer, until the ice comes again—ha! Art awake, Crawford? Here's food and drink, such as we ha' got left. Don't move too much, for this cursed craft of ours is cranky."

"One o' the French ships ha' sent a pinnace after us!" yelled a man. "See her bit o' sail, master?"

Deakin cursed, then laughed, for it was close to sunset.

"Sink me, let 'em come! No bluff-bowed navy boat can keep up wi' this canoe, and they'll be glad to give over the chase before dark. Here y'are, Crawford——"

Crawford thankfully ate and drank, while the canoe plunged on. The pursuing sail was lost to sight ere twilight, and when a small river appeared on their left, Deakin held the canoe in for it. He wanted to renew their scanty supply of fresh water and give all hands half an hour ashore, as well as to rearrange their makeshift sail.

Upon landing, one of the men took the fusil and departed after game, presently returning with a rabbit. A fire was set going, and all five gathered about it. Crawford was weak, but long sleep had refreshed him and the weakness would soon pass, while his split scalp was already healing beneath soothing Indian unguents. When the five had polished off the last drop of broth and the

last scrap of meat from the boiled bones, a remnant of tobacco was shared.

"Now—what!" demanded Crawford, meeting the wide gaze of Moses Deakin. The latter, having learned Crawford's tale by snatches, grimaced in his beard.

"As to you? Well, I said ye were a warlock, and it's proved true. Another eight leagues, and we'll land to cut across Cape Churchill. No use rounding that shore when we can save time and food by legging it. As for you, we're square. I've paid ye tit for tat."

"Granted," said Crawford. "You've not seen my ship or men?"

"Nay. Will ye come with us?"

Crawford smoked out his scanty allotment of tobacco.

"Agreed," he said, wondering whether he would find Frontin at the Danish river. If Frontin had read that scrap of bloodstained paper, had brought the *Northstar* to the place—then what? If there were no south sea passage, what lay in the future? Was the horizon empty? Crawford put his hand inside his shirt and pulled forth the Star of Dreams, still safe on its thong. The other men blinked at the green jewel in the firelight.

"Agreed," repeated Crawford. "I'm with you, Cap'n Deakin. We'll see what haps at the Danish river."

"Ay," growled Deakin, and rose. "All hands! Let's get off while the wind holds."

CHAPTER IV

PREDICTIONS AND EVENTS ARE SOMETIMES RECONCILED

IN the twilight of another summer's night, with the barely sunken sun again rising, Moses Deakin and Crawford and three men of Boston town, once enemies but now strangely friends and allies against disaster, came upon the river which white men called the Danish, striking it two miles above the magnificent harbour.

The five men, crossing overland from the other side of Cape Churchill, had met not a soul on their trail through the woods, and for this there was good reason. In ancient days the tribes had found a great ship floating here, full of dead white men and wonderful things, and they gathered around by scores to thaw out frozen boxes and barrels; but certain of the kegs held powder. So ship and dead men and redskins went thundering up in ruin, and now the Indians called this the River of Strangers, and shunned the bay in legendary fear and horror.

There in the landlocked harbour under Point Eskimo, stout Jens Munck had watched his Danish colonists die, had gone four days without food, knew himself dying of scurvy, and so sat down to pen the last line in his log-book. And what a trumpet call of the spirit he wrote there! "Herewith, good night to all the world; and my soul to God." Yet he lived, and lived to work one ship back to Norway, two staggering men helping him. The

Danish river had known heroes in those days, ay, and was to know heroes often enough in days to come!

So Crawford and the four with him started down the river bank toward the harbour, following the course of the wide stream. As they went, Moses Deakin fired the fusil and pistols again and again in the air, and sent his stentorian voice ringing up among the trees, lifting brazen curses because neither his agent, who was a Creek chief, nor any other redskin appeared. If they had any message from the Star Woman, they would not dare go away until it was delivered; and while they would not camp at the feared bay itself, they would remain near by and keep out scouts to watch for Deakin.

Crawford, who was by this time well again save for his half-healed scalp, said naught of his own hopes but smiled to himself. He was looking forward eagerly to seeing the bark lie anchored in the harbour, and to meeting Frontin. Surely Frontin must hear those shots, and the ringing bellow of Deakin, and the wild yells in which the other men joined! As the five wended downstream, the huge Bostonnais glared at the thick forest which closed in everything, and cursed the Indians who did not appear.

"Why aren't the red devils on hand to meet us?" he roared forth at length, as they came to a bit of more open shore, girded by trees and brush. "They've never failed afore this! They bring down the furs, camp in a village somewhere near at hand, across the bay, and keep scouts posted for first sight o' me. Blood and wounds, where are the red dogs? Ahoy, ye rogues! Wake up!"

From the green trees that closed down like a wall, came a low and mocking burst of laughter. The five men

halted and stared about in startled astonishment. Swift upon the heels of that laugh rose a voice in English.

"Thanks for warning us, Moses Deakin! At him, lads——"

The trees vomited powder-smoke, the roar of fusils echoed out, then a riot of figures came bursting forth from ambush. The man in front of Crawford fell, riddled by balls. The huge figure of Deakin swayed and tottered and crashed to earth; the man at Deakin's heels screamed out as a cutlass split his skull. Then Crawford and the other remaining man were down beneath a mass of assailants, and eager hands bound them fast. So swift and deadly was this assault that not a blow was struck in return.

Deakin, unconscious from a bullet that had raked across his brow, was bound and carried off; after him, Crawford and the other man were dragged. Crawford stared at his captors in stupefied bewilderment. Frontin, indeed! These were utter strangers, English by their talk, and in command of them one Captain Moon. The name struck Crawford with enlightenment. Aboard the prize, he had heard Smithsend mention the little brig *Perry*, under this same Captain Moon—an unit of the company's fleet which had presumably foundered in the straits.

When the party emerged from the trees and came out upon the shores of the landlocked harbour, Crawford stared yet harder. There, inside the north point, lay the broken wreck of a small ship, beyond doubt the *Perry*; she had split her keel on the outer rocks and had been swept inside, a total loss. Waiting beside the huge piles

of salvaged barrels and goods were Indians—lordly Crees and men of the bay-shore tribes, a good fifty of them at least.

These were sitting about in a half-circle facing the shore and the wreck, and it became evident that Moon had interrupted a council to go and lay his ambush. Perhaps the redskins here assembled had been friends to Moses Deakin in other days, but now their prodigality of gewgaws and blankets showed that Moon had spent much of his precious salvage to win them over, and none of them moved from their serried rank to greet the Bostonnais.

Now Moon, after giving his men orders, went with his lieutenant to rejoin the waiting Indians. Deakin was placed against a tree and lashed fast to it, Crawford was dragged to another—and then Deakin's one surviving man broke free and made a dash for safety. He was shot down before he had gone twenty feet, and died there. Crawford offered no resistance, and was glad enough to be mistaken for one of Deakin's crew, lest worse befall him. If he were posted in Boston as a pirate, news of him must have reached London ere this. He stood bound to the tree and surveyed the scene before him, while Moses Deakin hung in his lashings, and the eighteen men who survived the wreck sat to one side talking and smoking, watching their officers parley with the redskins.

Moon, speaking in a mixture of French and English, demanded that the Indians supply him with canoes and guides down the coast, and that they follow him to Nelson with their beaver. There was some hitch about this.

Crawford could not uncover it, nor could Moon, until at last a chief arose, threw aside his blanket, and spoke in excellent French.

"We have a message for the Big Bear," and he pointed to the figure of Moses Deakin. "We have traded with the Bostonnais because the Anglais have not come here. Now the Anglais have very strong medicine. They have destroyed the ship of the Big Bear, have killed his men, have captured him. We shall trade with them, and bring the packs of castor from our camp across the bay. But first we must give this message to the Big Bear. This message has been brought to the Crees from far away, by a chieftain of the Sauteurs or Chippewas, who had it from another nation called Nadouisioux. If this message is not delivered to the Big Bear, our father Kitchiminitou who lives in the sun will be displeased and will hide his face from us, because this message comes from his daughter the Star Woman."

At this name, Crawford started. Moon, who did not know what to make of this talk about a message, made a curt response.

"Big Bear is to be hanged."

"That is good," said the Cree chief. "But first let him receive this message, if he will accept it."

Moon had no choice but to obey, and ordered his men to revive the senseless Deakin. Crawford watched in wondering surmise. Beyond a doubt, then, the Star Woman was no Indian myth, but a real person! Deakin's insolent summons had gone to her, passed from tribe to tribe—and here was the answer to be delivered!

Now Moon strode over to the two captives, gave

Crawford one curious glance, then turned his attention to Deakin. The latter, under the impact of icy water from the bay, was glaring and blinking around, helpless to move; a furious thing he was, and grim to behold, all his grizzled beard being dribbled and matted with blood from his wounded forehead. Moon stood laughing at him.

"It was kind of ye to give us warning wi' shot and shout!" he exclaimed. "Well, Moses Deakin, shalt have thy head lying in salt when we leave here; the company hath twenty pound on those moustachios. And why? For that broadside ye poured into us last year i' the straits, and killed poor Cap'n Allen—ay, into a royal navy ship too! Dost mind how ye slid out from among the bergs and poured in shot, and went scooning down the wind and away? Ay, and now that work is to cost ye a head."

The Bostonnais spat at his tormentor.

"That for ye, and the pox to boot!" he roared. "Ye'll never have my head! It's no hand of man can bring me to death, but only the gift of a woman——" Deakin swallowed hard, then suddenly recollected everything. "Hark, cap'n! We be from the south, wi' great news. Iberville ha' whipped the company's fleet, and by now is master of Nelson——"

"What else, liar?" exclaimed Moon, laughing.

"Nay, 'tis truth! Ask Crawford, here. And what hope have ye, with your ship gone? There is one man can guide ye out, can bring ye safe south again to Albany or New Severn—and that's Moses Deakin. Come, I'll bargain with ye——"

Captain Moon roared with laughter, whereat Deakin lost temper and caused Moon to roar anew.

"Iberville indeed! There are no French on the bay, ye rascal pirate! If there were, they'd be soon enough swept away——"

This disbelief maddened Deakin, who cursed and raved like a maniac, until presently the officer quieted him with a word.

"These redskins have a message for ye from one called the Star Woman. Do ye want it or not, afore we hang ye?"

Deakin stared, sobered suddenly, swallowed his wrath. "Be that truth?"

"Ay." Moon surveyed him curiously. "Who's this Star Woman?"

"Sink me if I know," growled Deakin, with a sidelong glance at Crawford. Moon shrugged, and ordered his men to loose both prisoners from the trees. This was done. Their arms were tied, and they were led to the circled ranks of red warriors, who met Deakin's glare with impassive countenances. Deakin and Crawford sat down, with Moon standing beside them. Behind clustered the company men, but at a little distance.

"Keep your mouths shut, now," warned Moon. "What's that chief getting his pipe for?"

"To smoke the sun," growled Deakin in reply.

The leading Cree chief produced a much-adorned calumet, and now proceeded to smoke the sun. This had nothing whatever to do with a peace smoke, and was only done on occasions of solemnity. Presenting the calumet thrice to the rising sun, he then held it aloft in both

hands and with it followed the course of the sun in the sky, chanting a prayer for happiness and favour; this done, he smoked for a moment, and handed the pipe to another chief, who repeated the ceremony. Half a dozen chiefs in all went through this ritual, then the pipe was laid away. The Cree chief produced a bundle of close-tied pelts, and stood up to address Moses Deakin.

"Last year my brother Big Bear gave us a message to deliver. That message was delivered. Here is the answer to that message. The hands of my brother Big Bear are tied. I give this belt to the hand of my brother the Anglais, that he may bring it to the sight of Big Bear."

Moon stepped forward to take the roll of skins from the chief. At this moment Crawford, who was intent on the ceremony, was startled to catch the low voice of Deakin at his ear.

"Quick! When I grab 'un, kick fusils into water."

It was no time to question whatever desperate plan Deakin had in mind, or to ask how he was to grab any one with his arms bound. Crawford glanced around. He saw that the company men, grouped behind and to one side, had stacked their fusils in two piles at the edge of the water. The guns were but ten feet distant.

Crawford gathered his muscles in readiness to spring, and then waited, tensed.

Captain Moon took the bundle of skins from the chief, half turned, and stood frowning. Then he sat down so that Deakin was on one side of him and the circle of redskins on the other, unsheathed his knife, and cut the thongs that bound the skins.

"Ay," said Deakin, straining forward, his wide nostrils flaring. "Open it!"

The officer did so, to disclose inner wrappings of doe-skin, likewise thonged. These gave place to yet a third wrapping—this time of soft, thick grey fur that drew from Moon an exclamation of astonishment. It was a white beaver pelt. The Indians, no less than the whites, were watching with intense interest, and from them came a chorus of grunts at sight of the white beaver. Then, as Moon drew this open, to disclose the heart of the whole business, white men and red stared in silence—the one in puzzled wonder, the other in comprehension.

The message from the Star Woman was a short, heavy arrow with fine thin head of barbed iron. The arrow was painted red. The insolent message of Moses Deakin had been answered, significantly enough, by a war-arrow.

"What's it mean?" demanded Moon, fingering it.

Deakin caught his breath for sheer rage, unable to speak. He knew well enough that all his dreaming had crashed down in this instant, with this response displayed to all eyes; he had hoped for a very different sort of message. Perhaps he had thought that, under its influence, the Indians would rise to his aid. Now, in those bronzed features circled around him, he saw only a stolid hostility. Big Bear had lost his medicine and the Anglais had overcome him; also the Star Woman had doomed him to death. The chiefs would shun this doomed creature, leave him to meet the fate which the dreaded Star Woman had decreed for him. That fate was death.

All this Moses Deakin beheld in the ring of faces, while Moon frowned down at the arrow and the white beaver

pelt. Then, suddenly, the bloodshot eyes of Moses Deakin dilated. His face under the matted beard purpled, his brow pulsed with knotted veins, and his shoulders heaved up.

“Ready, Crawford!” burst from him, as the sea-rotted hemp burst away from his mighty arms. “Blood and wounds—got ’un!”

With one hand he seized Moon by the neck, drawing him close, and the other great paw gripped the knife in Moon’s hand. Crawford, despite bound arms, shot to his feet.

No one save the watching, impassive Indians realized what was happening. The company men saw only Deakin seizing their skipper, while Crawford leaped up and darted to the piled fusils and began to kick them into the water. Then indeed the men sprang up cursing and shouting—but the brazen voice of Deakin bellowed out and held them motionless.

“One move, ye dogs, and your skipper dies!”

Lieutenant and men huddled there, staring, all adread, and no wonder. There seemed something frightful and unearthly about this shaggy, blood-smeared figure that had suddenly burst his bonds and uprisen like some prehistoric monster, holding or rather hugging, bear-fashion, the frantically writhing Captain Moon—gripping the man’s whole throat in one gnarled paw, lifting him from his feet, glaring above him at the staring men. The Indians sat motionless, still tense from the sight of that war-arrow, holding themselves aloof.

“To me, Crawford!” rang out the stentorian voice.

Crawford, his task accomplished, now came back to the

side of Deakin, while Moon's men dared not lift a finger lest the knife bite their skipper. To be a company captain meant much; each captain was to his men as a little god, something a trifle more than human, whose slightest word was law ordained. Now, with his knife, Deakin slashed the bonds of Crawford.

"Weapons—then to the trees."

Free, Crawford leaped at the men who gave back before him. From one he caught a hangar, from the gaping lieutenant a gold-decked rapier, perhaps brought out from London as a gift for Governor Bailey at Nelson. Then back to Deakin, now retreating slowly toward the trees, backing around the circle of intent redskins, snarling as he gripped his limp captive.

Then from the lieutenant burst horrified words.

"The cap'n—dead! At 'em—cut 'em off!"

Indeed, what had been Captain Moon was now a poor dead thing, head horribly askew in that fierce grip. Moses Deakin had defeated himself. The men's stupefaction fled. A yell broke from them and they flooded forward. Deakin dropped his victim, seized the hangar from Crawford.

"Too late!" he snarled. "Another minute——"

Too late indeed; a pistol roared, and Deakin staggered as the ball hipped him. Crawford might have run for it, but that was not his way; a laugh broke on his lips and he halted. The Bostonnais, knife and cutlass in hand, stood like a bear at bay. Crawford made one desperate effort to stay the onrush.

"Hold, men! Your fleet's destroyed—Nelson is captured—your only chance is——"

A howl of fury drowned his words and the company men closed in, wielding hangars, knives, clubbed muskets, anything and everything. Deakin's hand moved, and the knife sang through the air; the lieutenant, blade through gullet, pitched down and lay still.

Crawford saw why those fusils had been kicked into the water, for with the firearms the company men would have picked off the two and shot them down. Now, back to back, Deakin and Crawford met the rush with whistling cutlass and delicate rapier; as the maddened crowd closed in blindly, men died by point and edge, for the only cool heads there were the two who faced their doom unafraid. Rapier slithered in and out, hangar crashed and whirled and thudded again, and the laugh of Crawford echoed the roaring bellow of the Bostonnais. The ranks of redskins, leaping up, watched the fight with gleaming eyes and low grunts of astonishment.

The company men soon had enough of this, for three of them were gasping at death and others were reeling away; they fell back, yelling at one another to close in yet none caring to be the first. Deakin bawled a laugh at them, pressing one hand to his thigh, but Crawford, eyeing that ring of fierce faces, smiled thinly.

"Your prophecy was right, Deakin," he panted. "Had it not been for that gift from the Star Woman, we might have——"

Deakin hurled curses at the watching chiefs who refused him aid, broke off short to dodge a hurled axe—and the circle was closing in again. This time more cautiously, clubbed fusils and bits of wreckage battering down while the holders stood beyond reach of hangar and rapier.

One man came in too far, and Deakin split his skull—but a gun-butt struck the giant over the head and staggered him. Like wolves they leaped upon him and had him down, and the writhing, heaving mass of men went rolling across the sand.

Crawford, ringed in, stood alone. An oar swept at him. He dodged it, leaped into action, flung himself at the circle about him, rapier licking in and out and sending men to cough their lives out—but a cutlass clashed on the thin blade and slithered it. Then they dragged at him, overwhelmed him; but those men worked their own ill. Crowding too close to get in straight blows, they gave Crawford a chance to work free, and he seized it. Next instant he was on his feet, his fists hammering them back. From the sand he caught up a cutlass, broke through them, found himself clear. Clear, yes—but at the water's edge, with the icy bay behind him and the ring of sullen, fury-filled men closing him in.

They were content to let him rest there a moment, for into the edge of their circle burst the writhing heap of men above Deakin. Twice Deakin hurled them clear, and twice they were in upon him before he could rise. Then, streaming with blood, battered and blind and a fearful thing to see, the giant came to one knee, gripping a screaming man in either hand. Inarticulate bellows foaming from his red-frothed lips, Deakin tore out the throat of the man in his right hand, and yelled madly. The other man, shrieking in awful panic, caught something from the sand in groping fingers and drove it home. Deakin lifted his great red paw and struck the man

down, then clutched at his breast. He fell backward, one terrible gasp breaking from his lips. From his breast stood out the red shaft of the Star Woman's gift. There died Moses Deakin of Boston.

From Crawford's throat pealed up the wild yell of the Iroquois, the war whoop of the Mohawk tribe:

"Sassakouay! Sassakouay!"

That yell lifted and swirled among the trees. The dread, well-known sound of it evoked a wild and startled response of whoops from the watching chieftains. At this, the circle of blood-maddened men hung back, thinking that the redskins were about to take them in the rear, but quickly regained confidence. They spat curses, and lifted weapons anew.

Crawford faced them, yet saw them not. He was spent, and knew it well, and queer visions came whirling at him as he reeled, dazed and battered. He saw the face of Iberville greet him with one flashing smile ere it faded; he saw Moses Deakin, wide-nostrilled, glaring upon him as the shade of Aias glared balefully upon the crafty Odysseus; he saw the faces of dead men whom he had known in other days, drawing in upon him, fading, passing away. And as he stood there, leaning dazedly upon the hangar, the Star of Dreams came out from his shirt and swayed. Sight of that green jewel halted the indrawing circle of men, halted them in sheer astonishment, held them staring for an instant. Then Crawford's vision cleared. He saw one wild ruffian heave up a fusil to drive down upon him—and with a laugh he whirled the hangar and sent it hurtling point first into the ruffian's breast.

Then they closed in upon him as he swayed, empty-handed. As they came, it seemed to him that he saw the face of Frontin, and heard the voice of Frontin ringing wildly in his ears. He took it for a welcoming to the other world—the world beyond the horizon—as he went down under the blows.

CHAPTER V

IT IS ONLY BY CROOKED LANES THAT ONE GAINS THE HIGHWAY

ON the shore of that landlocked harbour at the mouth of the Danish river, where after another snow or two was to rise the palisaded front of Fort Churchill, was now being enacted a curious scene before the astonished and startled eyes of the assembled redskins, who had held their places only from a sense of dignity—and because they had nowhither to run.

Lying bound at the water's edge were six men—all that remained from the company of the wrecked ship in the shallows. The others lay as they had fallen, from the savage attack of those men who came bursting from the trees—Frontin and Sir Phelim Burke, with those who followed them. Crawford, helped by two of his men, doused the icy water over face and head, cleared his eyes and rose, and gripped the hands of his friends.

"A miracle!" he said. "You say Serigny captured the corvette? What miracle——"

"Devil a bit of it," exclaimed Phelim Burke. "We saw that canoe of yours heading north along the coast—Frontin declared that he recognized you, through the glass. So Serigny gave us a boat and we came after you. Did ye not hear the gun fired?"

"Serigny—gave you a boat?" Crawford stared hard.

"He wanted the corvette, would not give it up," said Frontin, frowning a little. "My faith, he meant to hang the lot of us offhand! But I had a talk with him." For one instant, the cynical visage of the man was clouded by an unwonted embarrassment. "You comprehend, cap'n, in another day and another world, I likewise had another name. Well, to the devil with all explanations! Facts are facts. I talked with Serigny, and though he'd not give up the corvette he gave us a boat, so there we were—and here we are. We landed where you did, followed your trail, and got here in time to put some shot into those rascals."

Crawford nodded. His head was clear enough now, and he perceived that instant action was needed. Ignoring his hurts for the moment, he forced himself to stride across the sand to where the circle of chieftains waited. They stared at him, at the blazing star hanging on his breast; and when he sat down and addressed them in French, they also sat down and listened.

"My brothers have seen that the medicine of Big Bear failed, and that the medicine of the Anglais also failed. Why? Because of my medicine." As Crawford held up the emerald star, grunts broke from the warriors. They could understand this. "I have come to smoke the calumet with my brothers from up-country."

There was a silence. Frontin and Sir Phelim and the other men drew in behind Crawford and waited. Then, because they had no more tobacco, and had not yet obtained any from the salvage, the head Cree chief produced a calumet and stuffed the bowl with fragrant *sagacomi* from his pouch. When he had lighted it, he handed it to

Crawford, who puffed and returned it. So the council was opened and the calumet smoked, and now Crawford, with characteristic readiness, faced an instant decision.

He had already learned from Deakin that if Cree chiefs were here, they would be here only in order to deliver the message from the Star Woman. As a rule they came far from their own country to the bay, in May or June, and only that message would force them to come later or delay them. It was obvious that these chiefs would be now wildly anxious to be gone home. So, when the leading chief had made a short and ceremonial address, he sat down to await his answer. Crawford let him wait, made his decision, then came stiffly to his feet and faced them.

"My brothers, you know what has happened here, but you do not know why I have come here. Look at this." Once more he held up the Star of Dreams. "I have come because the Star Woman sent this to lead me to her. I am going home with you. You will take me up-country with you and then send me on to the Star Woman with guides."

Stifled grunts of awe and amazement sounded. Crawford continued swiftly.

"My brothers, you have brought beaver for Big Bear. It is of no use to me, but I will buy it from you. I will give you all these goods from the wrecked ship, such as I do not need, then you will cache the beaver here and leave it until next year, or until I come again to get it. To-morrow we will arrange these matters, and then we will leave for your own country. Go to your camp, and return here to-morrow. I have spoken."

There was silence, while Crawford's men stared at one another, and the wounded men by the water groaned in their bonds. Then, with silent acceptance of his words, the chiefs broke up the council and departed among the trees. No sooner were they gone, than Crawford swung up and faced his men.

He looked at Frontin and met a dry smile. He looked at Sir Phelim Burke and met a twinkle of the eye. He looked at his men and then laughed suddenly.

"My lads, we have no ship. Our seafaring days are ended, for we have crossed that horizon. Here is a chance that has come to me, to go farther, where no white men have gone, to see new things. I am going into the unknown country with these Indians. I have learned that the Star Woman is no myth, no legend, but actually exists—and I'm going to find her. I don't ask any of you to come with me. There's naught for you at the end of this journey. If ye want to go to Fort Nelson, go freely. In any case, I'll loose these prisoners and let them go. If ye come with me, I'll be glad. Talk it over with your comrades, Dickon. You with your men, Phelim——"

"Divil take the talk!" and Phelim Burke laughed out. "These Burkes will do as I say, Hal Crawford, and ye know my mind already. We're with ye, if it's into hell!"

"Ay, master!" spoke up the man Dickon, whilst his comrades growled approval. "The horizon be as good one place as another—and we be your men!"

Crawford looked at Frontin, his blue eyes all asparkle.

"And you, old buccaneer? Wilt go to Nelson and join Serigny? Or wilt go——"

Frontin shrugged, but his affected cynicism could not hide the quick glow in his dark countenance.

"I? Bah! Don't be a fool. I go to get some soup over the fire, and advise you to do the same——"

A roar of laughter broke the tension.

BOOK III

THE STAR GOES, THE WOMAN REMAINS

CHAPTER I

IT DOES NOT PAY TO BE MERCIFUL

NOW the story passes to a mid-afternoon of spring in the far northwest, where as yet spring was only a name of bitter mockery. Hal Crawford and his men, with the terrified Cree guides who led them, staggered over the snow crust of a tree-girded valley, along the open space which held a frozen stream hidden beneath its ice and snow.

Far in the lead went the Cree trail-breaker. Crawford followed him, and behind Crawford came Frontin. The others, Indians and white men, straggled along as best they could, Sir Phelim Burke bringing up the rear and driving them on. As he wearily followed the Cree on between the lines of dark trees, Crawford began to feel the grip of hopeless despair—and with reason.

"Can do no more, lad!" rose the voice of Phelim Burke. "Two men down."

Crawford glanced back to the group of men and halted.

"Make camp and a fire," he called. He met the eyes of Frontin, but neither man spoke.

This valley ran from northeast to southwest. Crawford looked back in the direction whence he had come, and in his mind's eye reviewed all the vast country across which he had struggled during the winter months, working from village to village, from tribe to tribe. Just behind him he saw the country of the Crees; beyond that

the villages of the Savanois or plains folk, those of the Monsaunis or swamp tribes, and finally the scattered groups of the Wenebigonhelinis or seashore people, who lived about the edge of Hudson Bay. How far away now seemed that bay, and the dead Moses Deakin!

Into the crawling wilderness had come this masterless master of men, working ever to the west and south. Still he heard new tales of the Star Woman, that half-mythical person whom none had seen but of whom all knew, and who was said to rule somewhere beyond—always beyond; and as he quested forward, slowly winning his way from tribe to tribe, from frozen swamp to frozen hills, the wild tales gradually settled into more sober legends. Now it appeared that the Star Woman was no ruler of vast regions, but a woman of mystical power and influence, a sorceress who lived somewhere near the country of the Dacotah or Nadouisioux; yet even among far peoples, her name was mighty. Ahead of Crawford flitted the word that he sought this Star Woman, protecting him and gaining guides. More, the Star of Dreams that hung upon his breast had swiftly won him the respect and fear of the tribes. To them it was medicine of the strongest, obviously connected with the Star Woman, so that they held Crawford as a man to be aided on his way to her and furthered in all things.

Thus, at least, had gone events; but now he encountered check.

He had sent ahead to get guides from the Stone Men, or Assiniboines, but these had not met him; day after day, only emptiness and bleak snow-desolation greeted him, with no signal smokes on the horizon. The Crees had

brought him into that debatable land which they termed the abode of dancing dead men, where the blood of slain folk and the power of devils made all things desolate, where Cree and Stone Man disputed roving bands of Sauteurs or Dacotahs from the south.

It was the dread seventh year, the year of famine, and during the past four days the party had found no game, not even a lone rabbit. Yet, on all sides of their line of march, were recent snowshoe trails, so that the Crees whispered of spirits and were sore adread. His little band were weak with hunger and fatigue. The Englishmen were terrified by this drear land, while the Irishmen talked of banshees and good people. The Cree guides were now held only by fear of Crawford and the dark Frontin; when their fear of spirits bore down their fear of things physical, they would decamp. Then what, in this drear region which Crawford thought himself the first white man to visit?

While Crawford stood there staring bleakly along the valley, the answer came with unexpected suddenness. The Cree trail-breaker had returned, passing Crawford and Frontin, and rejoined the weary men about the fire. From the trees just ahead, there rose a deep voice that spoke in English.

"Crawford! Come for'ard and talk wi' me."

Frontin's jaw fell. Crawford stared at the trees, utterly aghast for an instant, until he saw a man step from the trees and start forward, across an open space of a hundred yards. A man—a white man!

"Devil take me! Is it real or a dream?" murmured Frontin.

"Real." Crawford came to life abruptly, recovering from his astounded surprise. "Come."

He started forward, and the other followed, staring. The stranger was confidently forging toward them across the snow, and was alone, apparently unarmed.

"Look at his ears!" said Frontin suddenly. "There's an animal for you, cap'n!"

The stranger was bareheaded, wore woollen shirt and trousers, no furs. He was not tall, but very wide, thickly built, long in the arm; his head was well set between broad shoulders. His hair, cut close and ragged by a knife, was a bright flame-colour, and his heavy features ended in a pointed red beard. His skin, too, was red and high-blooded, while his ears were set very high on his head. He had all the look of a vigorous animal alive with power, and his eyes were of a light grey, whitish and almost colourless, but extremely sharp and alert.

The three came together. The stranger stood gazing at the other two—Frontin, hawk-nosed and saturnine, dark and grimly cynical; Crawford, thin and hatchet-faced, his heavy-lidded blue eyes somehow expressing his indomitable spirit. The stranger spoke abruptly.

"Which is Crawford? Workin' for the French company?"

"I am Crawford, but I'm working for myself. Who the devil are you?"

"My name's Maclish, agent of the English company." Maclish spoke with a slight Scots burr. "I've had word of your coming, and I'm here to send ye back."

"Oh!" said Crawford. The other showed yellow fangs in a laugh.

"Don't understand it, eh? Thought you could come up-country for the French and nobody know about it, eh? Well, you'll learn different."

"I'm not for the French," said Crawford.

"Don't believe a word of it," retorted Maclish cheerfully. "After Iberville swept the north end o' the bay last year, I was at Albany with Kelsey. Lucky Iberville couldn't make a clean sweep o' things! Well, we heard that a fur-pirate named Crawford was heading inland in French employ, so Kelsey sent me along to stop the game. And I'm here. You know about Kelsey, maybe?"

Crawford shook his head.

"Kelsey broke out o' bounds years ago and came up among the Stone Men. He married a red princess and brought down all the trade, so the company made him a blooming lord in high command. And with a bit o' luck, I'll be the same one o' these days."

Maclish paused to stuff a pipe. Crawford stood immobile, his brain racing. So this man had overreached him—had got ahead of him in the dead of winter! Amazing as the fact was, bitter as it was, Crawford instantly gathered himself to face the situation.

"So I'm not the first white man in this country?" he asked, to gain time.

"Devil a bit of it. Kelsey's first, I'm second, and next year the company starts inland. The old orders are dead. No more keeping the company servants cooped up! Iberville's cut us off from the north o' the bay, so we'll work the East Main and the up-country. When your messages came to the Assiniboines, asking for guides, I got 'em."

Maclish puffed and chuckled complacently, obviously pleased with himself.

"Pawky devils, those chiefs!" he went on. "They're afraid o' the Star Woman, but they're more afraid o' losing their trade—and not a cursed bit afraid o' you and your Crees! Besides, I've got the young warriors all with me. I've heard tales about that Star Woman myself, and I've an exploring commission from Kelsey; so here I am—and back you go!"

Had not Maclish been so entirely self-satisfied, he might have taken warning from the deadly cold manner of Crawford.

Crawford, however, was far from sure of his course. Had the Crees taken him south to the Lake Superior country, he would have avoided the trap; instead, they had brought him into this disputed region just south of the Assiniboine country, declaring that the Star Woman lived in that direction. While the Assiniboines, or Stone Men, were in much awe of the Star Woman, they stood in no fear of a strange white man seeking her. They had long since been bound to the English cause through Kelsey, and Maclish was clever enough to play his cards well.

"So I go back?" said Crawford.

"If you're wise." Maclish showed his yellow teeth. "And I go on."

"Eh? You go on?" Crawford's eyes narrowed.

"Just that—to find the Star Woman my ain self!" Maclish chuckled. "Until I learned of her, I thought to follow Kelsey's example and take a young squaw from among the Stone Men; but not now. It's a big chance, ay! How much d'ye ken of her?"

"Little," said Crawford shortly. His gaze was stabbing at the trees around, but he could discern nothing at all. Either Maclish had come alone, or had a force of men hidden. Now Crawford understood those strange snowshoe tracks that had been seen. He saw, too, that in this red-faced agent of the English company he had to do with a savage and resolute enemy. This fact cheered him up somewhat, for Hal Crawford had his own way of dealing with enemies.

But now Maclish waxed garrulous. No doubt the sound of his own voice was good to him, after this winter spent among the Stone Men.

"They've uncommon queer tales of her," he went on. "It seems that her people are the Dacotah, but she lives somewhere on holy ground; any place where she is, I gather, is holy. That's the lay of it. A fine bonny lass, I hear, wi' blue eyes and a star of blue stones. White blood in her, most like. Ay, it's a big chance, and ye may be sure the young men are all with Maclish!"

"What's a big chance?" queried Crawford, anxious to keep the man in talk.

"To marry her, o' course! Ye ken, maybe, there's war between the Dacotah and the Stone Men? Ay. All those western tribes down below are at war wi' the Stone Men, while the Sauteurs hang neutral. Those Dacotah, ye ken, are kith and kin to the Stone Men; and they're not so far from here, neither. Well, I'll marry her and then we'll drain all the trade out o' French hands to the bay. All those Lake Superior tribes will obey the Star Woman. And then who'll be the company's lord, eh? Maclish, ye

can lay to that! We'll make peace among the tribes, and Maclish bringin' down the beaver!"

Crawford sensed only vaguely the tremendous purpose behind the man, the far-reaching scheme which this Scot had so shrewdly plotted. He was more actively concerned with this actual news of the Star Woman. He had heard much, during the winter, about those fierce tribes who termed themselves by the proudly simple name of "The Men," and were known to others by the generic Algonquin word Nadouisioux or Sioux, meaning "enemies." Between the Iroquois in the east and these Dacotah in the west, the lesser red tribes were as corn between the grinders.

"So you intend to find her, do you?" asked Crawford.

"Ay. Only a few hours' march from here is a place they call the Spirit Lake—some sort of holy ground, it is. The Stone Men tell me a message can reach her from there; just how, I don't rightly ken. But if a message can reach her, then so can a man! So that's the lay of it. You'll go back, and I'll go on."

Only a few hours' march! Crawford laughed suddenly, and his laugh brought crafty guile and alarm into the eyes of Maclish.

"You fool!" said Crawford, a sudden blaze of anger in his face. "You think to stop me, do you?"

"Right, cap'n," said the voice of Frontin, and the dark man smiled terribly. "Now's the time to do the stop-ping."

Maclish took a backward step, hastily.

"No, no! Will ye ha' patience?" he cried out. "It's only a warning I'm giving ye, no more! If ye go for'ard, it's your ain fault, not mine! I ha' naught to do with it."

Frontin thrust his dark features out.

"Hark to the liar and rogue!" said he. "Cap'n, there's bad guile in this fox. It's in my mind to put a knife in him here and now."

Maclish, who had lost his swaggering confidence, held out his empty hands.

"If I meant ye harm," he said, "would I ha' come without a weapon to meet ye? If ye mean to murder me, go ahead, then. If not, we'll part on it and no more said."

"Right," said Crawford, with sudden decision. "Go your way, and don't cross my road again. I'm no murderer, so be off."

With this, Maclish turned and started for the trees up the valley.

"Devil take me, but we did wrong to let him go!" said Frontin.

Crawford shook his head. The two friends went side by side toward their staring band of men, who had witnessed this amazing meeting without having been able to hear its import.

"No. The rascal changed his tune in a hurry, if you noticed—and why? Because he must have few men with him. He does not dare oppose us. Now, think! If that Spirit Lake is only a short march away, we'll be there to-morrow. You heard what he said about reaching the Star Woman. With luck, we'll not need the Assiniboine guides after all."

"I don't like it," muttered Frontin. "I don't like the very name of these Stone Men!"

Crawford laughed shortly, and they met Sir Phelim Burke and walked with him to the fire, telling of what had

passed. Sir Phelim wrinkled up his nose and eyed the trees.

"My word is to get out of this valley," he declared. "We'd best make no night camp with red dogs hanging around. Here, ask the guides if they know about this Spirit Lake!"

Crawford nodded. "Break camp!" he commanded sharply, and beckoned one of the Crees. He was just putting the question to the red man, when from the fringe of trees there roared up the voice of Maclish.

"So I can't stop ye, eh? Then take it, ye lousy rogues——"

A musket crashed, and the Cree beside Hal Crawford plunged and thrashed in the snow like a stricken partridge.

From the trees all around shrilled up a wild chorus of yells. Another musket and another spoke out from that encircling ring of unseen foes; then came a buzz and a hum of loosened bowstrings, and shafts began to pour in from the trees. It was not battle, it was murder. With guns all fur-cased against the frost, unable to sight an enemy, Crawford and his men could strike scarcely a blow. The wild yells of the Stone Men, fierce cousins of the fiercer Dacotah, pealed up in triumph and hideous mockery.

The five Cree guides died where they stood. An Englishman coughed with an arrow through his gullet, and lay reddening the snow. Sir Phelim Burke reeled up to Crawford, a shaft protruding from his side.

"Got us, Hal!" he cried. "At them, lad——"

Crawford caught him as he fell, saw his helpless men

dropping, heard the black curses of Frontin, knew that he was utterly lost and all his men. Then, sudden as it had burst, the treacherous storm was stilled. The voice of Maclish lifted again from among the trees.

"There's stoppage for ye, Crawford! Now sit ye down, and I'll talk a bit more with ye presently, when I get these red devils quiet."

Then fell silence, and ghastly horror on the valley where the snow lay reddened. So suddenly had it all passed, that save for the dead men the thing seemed like a dream.

It was Frontin who took charge, his frost-blackened lips cracking out oaths and commands, making the men pile arms and gather around the fire. There was naught else to do, for they were caught in the open and ringed around with foes. Hal Crawford, for once, was incapable of action, as he gently let Phelim Burke sink into the snow, pillowed his head, and sat gazing into that scarred and branded face which was now greying in death.

In this bleak land, with the great silence of the snow barrens pressing down on the white horizon, Phelim Burke's broken body had come to its last peace. Crawford chafed the cold hands, looked once at the dark wound, and could say nothing. Then, presently, Burke's eyes fluttered open; a wistful smile came to his pallid lips, and his fingers pressed those of Crawford.

"Hal! Nay, leave the arrow be. It hurts not."

Crawford choked. This man was more to him than his own father had ever been.

"Take it not so hard, lad; why, lad, what matter?"

said Burke. "I go joyful enough, be sure! The leg they broke on the rack will hurt no more. And, Hal, have ye ever known any man to live for ever? Not I."

"Oh, Phelim! If you'd not followed me here——"

"Nonsense!" Phelim Burke smiled again, though sweat dewed his cheeks. "I'll wait for ye over the last horizon, lad. Tush, now! It's little enough to die—what else ha' we lived for? If it was you, lad, ye'd go with a laugh."

"But it's you, Phelim—and I love you!"

"Ay, it's me, save the mark! And if the blessed saints will maybe lend me a hand, Hal, I'll stay with ye till the Star Woman's found. Oh, lad, I'd like to see over that horizon! Ay, I'll stay with ye, for maybe she's the woman for ye after all. Mind ye keep the Star o' Dreams safe, since it's in my mind that your fate lies in the jewel——"

His jaw fell for an instant, and he gasped. Then his eyes opened wider, and he loosed Crawford's hand and reached out at the air in front of him. His childhood's tongue came back to him for the last moment.

"It's not you that will be leaving me a long while alone, Hal—and look—look! The sun's growing brighter—*duar na criosd!* Oh, the bright glory of it, and little Eileen beckoning to me—oh, and she so beautiful, so beautiful——"

So Phelim Burke, smiling and with the soft Gaelic on his lips, put out his hand into the air and touched fingers with life that none other could see.

Presently Crawford looked up, and saw the Irishmen who had loved Sir Phelim standing around, tears running down their ragged beards, with Frontin and three Englishmen beside; the others were dead. "*Mhuire as truagh!*"

burst out the Irish voices, but at that wail, Crawford came stiffly to his feet and cut short the keen cry.

"Phelim na Murtha is at peace—see you not the smile on his lips? Mourn not. Instead, divide among you what food is left. Frontin, are all the others dead?"

"All warm now, cap'n. Four of us wounded." Frontin showed a rag about his arm where a shaft had torn the flesh somewhat. "Load the guns, break for the trees—eh?"

"No," said Crawford curtly. His gaze swept around, but found only silent trees and bleak white solitude. He was trapped and helpless. "Dig a grave in the snow—it's the best we can do for poor Phelim. Wrap him in the spare furs."

"There comes that red devil down the valley, cap'n."

Crawford looked, and saw the burly figure of Maclish. Then he saw Maclish stop and fling back his head, and caught the insolent call.

"Come ye out and talk, Crawford! Bring your black dog if ye like—there's guns all trained on ye. No talk now of putting a knife in me, eh?"

Crawford beckoned to Frontin and walked out toward where Maclish stood. Desperately, he fought down his raging anger; he must keep cool at all costs. It would do no good to strike down this murderous rogue and then die at the hands of the hidden Stone Men.

"Well, say your word!" exclaimed Maclish, baring his yellow fangs. "Those young men of mine are impatient. Do you go back to Albany, or shall we finish you off?"

"I don't go back, that's certain," said Crawford, eyeing

him steadily. "All I ask you is to spare those men of mine. Let them go in peace."

"So!" Maclish laughed at this. "You'd sooner stay under the snow, eh? Have it any way ye like, man. I'll be going on to find the Star Woman—hey! What deil's business is this?"

He swung around, the agile movement betraying that his brawn was all corded sinew. From the trees, near and far, were sounding sharp staccato yelps, indicating the large force of men concealed; then appeared figures leaping into sight, shouts flinging back and forth. Even Crawford comprehended that something eventful had occurred.

After a moment two Indians left the trees, starting forward toward the group. One of them was stumbling, exhausted, his snowshoes dragging as he walked. The other was obviously a chief—the chief of the Stone Men with Maclish. The Scot, who must have comprehended what the shouting meant, spat an oath and then stood frowning. Crawford, alert to snatch at whatever might turn up, waited in silence.

The two redskins came forward across the snow. The messenger panted out swift words, accompanying them by pantomime which showed that he had been drawn to this place by the smoke of Crawford's fire. That he was not one of Maclish's party was fairly evident from his manner. Maclish heard him out, heard a word from the chief, then swore fervently and looked at Crawford.

"The deil's luck! A message for ye, Crawford," he said, snarling. "This lad and two others were hunting, were caught by some Dacotah, and the others were killed.

This lad was sent back with a message, and the chief says ye must have it."

"What's the message?" demanded Crawford. Maclish eyed him sullenly, but delivered it.

"That two chiefs sent by the Star Woman expect to meet ye at the Spirit Lake. News of you has gone on, eh? Now, what d'ye know of it?"

Crawford shook his head in negation. Looking from the angry Scot to the Assiniboine chief, he swiftly weighed and sifted the matter, while Frontin muttered behind him. He saw suddenly that Maclish no longer dared murder him; this direct message from the Star Woman had disturbed the Stone Men in most singular fashion—they regarded it as an interposition at a critical moment. Though foes of the Dacotah, these Stone Men greatly dreaded the Star Woman, and would not dare prevent Crawford going to meet her emissaries. At the same time, Maclish was not a man to be easily cheated of his prey.

"I'll trade with you," said Crawford. "Now listen, ye redbeard Scots rogue! For the work ye've done this day, I mean to put ye in hell—mark that well! Your Indians won't stop me now, for fear o' the Star Woman. Shall we make a bargain, or fight it out between us, here and now?"

Maclish was furious, but held his temper back. With a trade in view, no canny Scot has ever been known to lose his head.

"What's the proposition?"

"I'll go on to the Spirit Lake with you and ten of your men. We'll get this message, then settle our own quarrel. Meantime, my men are to be let go unhindered, back to the bay. They're not to be prisoners——"

"Ay." Maclish fingered his red beard, angrily. "Ay, we ha' sore need o' men at the south posts, after the way Iberville stripped us. If they'll take company service, they'll be gladly welcomed. H'm! So you and I go on alone, then?"

"And I," spoke up Frontin. Maclish darted a glance at him.

"And who are ye?"

"My friend," said Crawford. "Take the trade or leave it. After we get the message from the Star Woman, we'll settle our quarrel. 'I'll put ye in hell for this day's work, mind that!'"

Maclish blew on his fingers and pondered. If Crawford were in a trap, Maclish certainly was in a quandary. The Scot had laid out a great programme—alliance with the Star Woman, all the Dacotah and southern trade drawn up to the bay posts, himself a great man after the manner of Henry Kelsey, a lord of the north! And now he was within actual reach of this Star Woman, provided he did not lose his head. Offend the Stone Men he dared not, and to kill Crawford now would certainly offend them.

"I'll do it," he said. "And to-morrow at the Spirit Lake I'll break your bit neck wi' my two hands! The Assiniboine chief and nine men go on with us. The others take your men back safe to the Cree country."

"Agreed."

"Then I'll talk it over wi' this pawky bird of a chief."

Maclish turned his back, beckoned the chief, and drew him somewhat to one side out of earshot. Frontin straightened up, and his hand dropped to his belt. Crawford checked him.

"No."

The dark hawk-face swept around. "Eh? With him dead——"

"No."

Crawford looked at Maclish and the chieftain, who were talking; then the Scot turned and waved his hand.

"All agreed," he said curtly. "We'll start in an hour and reach the lake by noonday to-morrow, or before."

Crawford and Frontin walked back toward their men. Presently Crawford smiled bleakly.

"With that man dead," he said, "who would pay me for the murder of Phelim Burke?"

Frontin looked a little astonished. "Death of my life! Do you want to see him at the stake, then?"

Crawford considered this. "After a fashion, yes. I want him to see himself at the stake."

"You err in the man, cap'n. I know that type, with ears so high set! He has no imagination. He is purely animal."

"Exactly," said Crawford. "Does an animal fear death? Not at all. An animal, however, invariably possesses one high quality, and that is pride!"

"Oh!" Frontin whistled softly. "Well, perhaps you are right. All the same, I tell you that this animal is dangerous."

"So am I," said Crawford. "By the way, does it occur to you that this message reached us just in time? I begin to think that the Star of Dreams is invincible."

"H'm!" Frontin scratched his chin. "Nine men back at Hudson Bay in an English post—now I wonder what's brewing in that devil's brain of yours, my friend?"

"Cortez burnt his ships behind him—I build mine," said Crawford. He clapped Frontin on the shoulder. "Well, the fool has let us live; now let him rue it! We have work to do, you and I. Let's lay Phelim Burke away—poor gallant gentleman who loved his king too well! Damnation to all kings and to all men who inherit what they have no power to earn or take!"

"That," amended Frontin cynically, "is an excellent key to the Scriptures, applicable to heaven as well as to things of this world, since one gains no free passage thither. To those who do not earn, damnation! I have no desire to be critical, my dear cap'n, but it is a pity that you do not turn your talents to theology. Heigh-ho! A queer world."

None the less, as he approached the wrapped body of Phelim Burke, Frontin crossed himself and his lips moved a little. There were gentler things inside this dark man—and crueller things too—than most other men would guess. When Phelim was laid away under the snow, and none could think of what to say above him except perhaps a paternoster and an ave, it was Frontin who spoke a few soft words which Crawford held long in his memory.

"Seigneur," said he, looking up at the sky, "where is Thy guerdon for what hath not been? Receive the soul of this man, and let the stars sing him welcome, and bid St. Michael make a place for him beside Thee; it was not his to seek the grails of pomp and power, for like Thee he knew how weak is strength, and how truth and justice fare not with the strong. Welcome him, Seigneur, for his sure faith in all the things that are not seen; and let the troublesome winds be hushed for him who was a better man than we here left behind. *Curam teneamus.*"

“Ay,” murmured Crawford. “We’ll remember you, Phelim—and so shall Maclish!”

So there slept Sir Phelim Burke na Murtha, and the long ululation of his Irishmen lifted in a doleful wail of mourning among the trees.

CHAPTER II

A KNIFE DOES DIFFERENT THINGS IN DIFFERENT HANDS

IN the heart of this northland wilderness, set amid trees like a green crystal jewel, was a hard-frozen little lake, solidly rimmed in by heavy evergreens, its ice blown clear and smooth by the keen winds. To-day it was calm and deathly still; the very air seemed heavy, bitter with the doom of men, chilled by the unseen breath which struck so terribly. In the centre of the lake thrust up a tiny islet of bare and jagged rock, now blown partially grey and naked, now cloaked with masses of ice. About the edge of this islet the first ice of winter had been flung up to form fantastic ridges and caverns.

This was the Spirit Lake. In this spot, to-day, was being enacted a singular and frightful drama, the more terrible because of its uncanny certainty, its mystery, its silence and absolute precision. The lake and islet were not sacred to peace, for no spot in this land was untouched of blood; but the islet, being the abode of spirits, was shunned by common consent. The red men did not like the looks of it on general principles.

No canoe furrowed this lake in summer. Around it for league on league were to be seen neither lodge-poles of the living nor tree-scaffolds of the dead. To north and northwest roamed the Stone Men; when they came down into this country of lakes and streams to seek game, they encountered the parties of Dacotah upsurging

from the south. To the east, yet keeping careful distance, roved the Crees. The Sauteurs or Chippewas also came up from the south, but these kept out of strife, standing neutral between Stone Men and Dacotah. While this islet in the Spirit Lake was a good place for young warriors to seek medicine and dream dreams, most of them preferred other quarters for this work.

It was still morning when the heavy green rim of the icebound lake gave birth to the figure of a man clad in wool capote and sash, short wide snowshoes slung over shoulder; he was followed by a second in like guise, both carrying French fusils. They were Sauteurs, belonging to a band out on winter hunt. They had no enemy to fear, yet approached the islet warily. Their reason for this approach was a faint trail across the smooth ice, a trail as of sharp caribou hooves which here and there had slipped or left distinct marks on the glassy surface.

These two hunters gradually drew closer to the islet, toward which ran the trail in a direct and undeviating line; that actual hunger drove them to follow such a trail was evident in their gaunt and famished aspect. Their eyes searched the jutting mass of ice and rock with sharp suspicion and wonder. To all appearance the islet was empty of life. Now the leading warrior drew near to the ice-rimmed shore, his brown features wrinkled by some indefinable perplexity, by a half-sensed warning. He came to the fantastic line of icy hummocks, looked down to be sure the caribou trail led into them, then slowly strode in among their masses. He vanished instantly. The second warrior stopped short, uttered a

low word, put hand to fusil. Something flashed red in the air, a streak of vivid scarlet cutting athwart the blue sky. The Sauteur clutched at his throat and toppled over; he lay motionless, dead ere he struck the ice, the shaft of a crimson arrow protruding from his gullet.

Some little time elapsed. Then, although no sign of living men appeared, there was a movement at the islet's verge—something uncoiled, mounted in the air. Out toward the prostrate figure shot a thin hide rope, unlooping and flying with the certainty of a darting snake. Its noose caught on the upturned foot of the dead man. The rope drew taut, the body slowly slid in toward the shore, still tightly gripping the fusil, and there vanished from sight. All was silent again, motionless, breathless.

Presently, at a point around the lake shore where the fringe of trees opened out a little, thirteen men appeared. They doffed snowshoes and made camp, their fire-smoke rising greyly against the sky. Three of these were white men, the others Assiniboines or Stone Men; and almost immediately these latter scattered out to hunt, leaving Crawford and Frontin alone with Maclish. The three stood gazing about, scanning the lake, the quiet sky, the silent trees.

"No sign of 'em," said the Scot, scratching his pointed red beard. His whitish eyes probed the shores around, and the treetops. "Likely they'll come to us when they see our smoke. Let's find some wet wood and make a good signal."

The three turned in among the trees.

After a time, at another point around the lake, a

man emerged upon the ice. He, too, was following the trail of sharp hooves; it was quite singular that such a trail should have been left, running straight to the little islet, and so he found it. He was the Assiniboine chief, and alone. Had he known that there were more than one of these caribou trails, all converging on the islet, each made with great cunning to simulate the stagger of a hurt or wounded beast, he might not have followed on—but he perceived only the one trail.

All the same, he was uneasy. He stared from ice to islet, paused now and again to touch a medicine bag at his throat, examined the open ice around him as a fox scrutinizes the openings about a bait. He slowly drew in toward the islet, showing on this side the naked rock to face the wind-blown north. He was taking no chances, either on angry spirits or maddened beasts. As he approached the shore he primed his musket afresh, narrowly examining the rocks. Little by little he drew closer, and presently leaped up to the nearest rock. One instant he stood there peering around, his figure sharply outlined against the sky—then he was gone, dragged down by some sinuous, uncoiling thing. A long cry started up, the death-yell of a chief; it was quenched midway. After that, the islet was silent again.

For some time the three white men waited about their built-up fire, which now sent a goodly column of smoke drifting upward. They were not at ease, however. Frontin was dark and snarling, Crawford moody and depressed; this contact with the man who had murdered Phelim Burke was something hard to endure. Maclish knew this, and watched them narrowly, and after a bit

rose. He went to the lake shore and stood gazing out at the island. The other two exchanged a glance, then joined him.

"Shall we have a look at it?" asked Frontin. "I'd like to see the spirits there."

"Ay, let's have a look," grunted Maclish. Crawford assented silently.

The three men started off across the smooth, glistening ice. All three were bareheaded, having doffed their furs, for now the winter chill was out of the air.

If this were gone, there was another sort of chill which reached them before half the distance to the islet was covered. Crawford, in the lead, felt it and knew that the others were also touched by the same perturbation. Perhaps it came from the tales of the red men, perhaps from some sixth sense; at all events, that silent mass of rock and ice imparted a strangely weird and uncanny impression. The feeling that unseen eyes watched them was acute. Two-thirds of the way to the island, Frontin suddenly halted.

"Me, I do not like this," he exclaimed. "If the trail were covered, it were better. Prime your gun, cap'n."

Crawford half turned. His moccasined foot slipped on the ice, and he fell heavily on hands and knees. Maclish grunted with swift malice.

"A bad omen for ye." Then the words died in a gasp of surprise.

Crawford rose. He fumbled at his breast, where a splendid thing now glittered. That fall had shaken from inside his coat the star which he wore there on a thong. He held it up, examining it to see if the jewel had suf-

ferred; the raw gold, the massy emeralds, glinted and glimmered in the afternoon sunlight. Maclish stared in speechless wonder; it was his first sight of the thing, his first indication that Crawford bore such a treasure.

Maclish was not the only one to stare. From the islet ahead rang out a sharp exclamation, and the three men looked up. They saw a queer creature standing there on the rocks gazing at them—a tall Indian, over whose head was flung the skull and robe of a bison, the fur cloaking his body. At that grotesque and horned apparition all three gazed, transfixed.

"Come!" To their still greater astonishment, the crested figure spoke in French. "Smoke the calumet. Come!"

Crawford could not tell whether this were an invitation or not, but he comprehended that sight of the star at his throat had brought the apparition.

"*Kola! Friend!*" said that singular creature perched against the blue sky, and flung out empty hands. "The Star Woman sent us to meet you. Come."

Then the figure vanished. The islet was bare and empty again.

"No spirit, but a trap," said Frontin, first to recover speech. "There are our messengers—and have a care, cap'n!"

"Deil take me," snorted Maclish, "but yon man spoke French! From the south, belike."

"Of course," said Crawford quietly. "Frontin, wait here with the muskets. It's no trap, but we'll not take chances." He passed his musket to Frontin. "Coming with me, Maclish?"

"Oh, ay."

Crawford resumed his course, Maclish at his elbow. Between these two men had passed few words since the previous day. Hatred lay between them, and fear. Maclish was a subtle and a canny man, but he could not fathom the stern silence and self-control of Crawford. Nor had the latter missed certain indications which warned him that Maclish was even now carrying on some treacherous game. The Stone Men had sent up lengthy smoke-signals which he could not read, and messengers had departed. It was tacitly understood that after meeting the Dacotah envoys, the quarrel between the two men would be settled—Maclish doubtless counting on murdering both Frontin and Crawford.

Now, gaining the shore ice, Crawford passed in among the hummocks, gained the rocks beyond, and mounted them. He heard Maclish coming to his side, and then jumped down. It was a hideous scene which greeted the two men, a scene which could not fail to give the impression intended.

Here was a hollow among the rocks, and in the centre of it a blackened space of old fires showing that the Dacotah envoys had been camped here for some little time. In the centre of this blackened area now blazed a fire of a few dry sticks—a very tiny fire, without smoke or heat, serving only to keep the red spark of life in being. Across from this fire sat in grave silence the man who had summoned them, his face streaked with white and vermilion under the horned bison robe; with him was a second man who wore the head and pelt of a grey timber wolf in similar fashion. Both of them regarded Craw-

ford and Maclish with steady scrutiny—but the two white men were staring hard at the lifeless things behind the two Dacotah.

These had been men, all six of them. Two Sauteurs, three Crees, and the Assiniboine chief of Maclish's party; they were dead, sitting in frozen silence as though watching the council fire, cunningly placed soon after death so that their rigid bodies assumed the sitting posture naturally. They had not been scalped. Only the horrible fixedness of eye and sinew betrayed their condition. A cry of fury broke from Maclish at sight of the chieftain.

"I'll have your scalps for this, ye rogues!"

"My brothers are welcome," said the bison-chief in French. "We do not understand the strange talk that is like the crackling of dried leaves."

"You'll understand it soon enough," retorted Maclish, in groping and barbarous French, and added an oath. "You've murdered the chief!"

Crawford, inwardly laughing at all this, struck in smoothly. The fact that these chiefs spoke French, which was obviously difficult for Maclish, was a godsend.

"This man is an Englishman," and he gestured toward Maclish, who was purple with fury. He is my enemy, and leads the Stone Men. He seeks the Star Woman, and so do I. Presently he and I will settle our quarrel. We await your message."

"That is good," said the Dacotah. "Standing Bull and Yellow Sky have brought belts from the Star Woman. We are of the nation of The Men, the Issanti clan of the Dacotah. The Star Woman ordered us to meet in this

fashion the white man who came to seek her, and to give him the belts. We have waited long. Now we do not understand who is to receive these belts. It was said that the white man was an Englishman, having red hair."

At these words Crawford started slightly. It was true that his hair was a reddish brown.

Maclish did not comprehend all that was said, between his poor command of French and his overpowering rage. Crawford, however, made a swift and shrewd guess that the message from the Star Woman was not a nice one; remembering the token she had sent Moses Deakin, he resolved to gamble heavily on this presumed fact. Now, as Standing Bull produced a calumet and a bag of willow bark, Maclish spat hot words at him.

"I will not smoke with you! Am I to smoke with you while the eyes of that dead chief reproach me?"

"The calumet has not been offered you," was the calm response. "We do not smoke with Englishmen, who are enemies of our brothers the French. Which of you is to receive the belts?"

Crawford intervened with precision.

"This man Red Bull seeks to marry the Star Woman and to carry her off among the Stone Men. It is to him that your belts are sent. I am an Irishman. With me is my friend, who is a Frenchman. I will call him."

This drew an approving grunt of surprise and pleasure. "*Was-te! Was-te!*" The burly Scot, with the game thus taken out of his hands, scowled. Crawford touched his arm.

"Watch yourself, Maclish! There may be other Dacotah stationed among the rocks, so go slowly. Their mes-

sage seems to be for you." He lifted his voice and called. "Ho, Frontin! Leave the guns and come along."

"You will see that I speak truly," he said to the two chiefs. "My medicine has sent me to meet you, that you may take me with you to seek the Star Woman. I shall go with you, and her heart will be glad. Look, here is my medicine!"

He laid bare the star of gold and emeralds, and at closer sight of this Star of Dreams, astonishment seized the two red men. Obviously, they had heard that the man seeking the Star Woman carried this jewel; they were visibly shaken by sight of it, knowing not what to say or do. Its effect upon them was profound, and it also plunged them into perplexity.

Now Frontin came scrambling over the rocks, and their eyes shifted to him. When he spoke in French, they grunted in recognition.

"Death of my life!" said he coolly, looking at the dead men. "This is a pretty scene!"

"Join me and smoke." Crawford seated himself opposite the Dacotah. The younger of these leaned forward and pointed at the star.

"What is the name of this medicine? Why does not the Red Bull wear it?"

Crawford laughed slightly and evaded. "It is the Star of Dreams, and it came to me from afar, in order to lead me to the Star Woman."

There was in his voice a certain surety which was impressive—for he himself had now come to believe in this jewel. This sincerity made itself felt as no mere words would have done.

Yet the gamble was a stiff one; and had not Maclish been so fumbling with his French, the affair might have gone otherwise, for the Scot was nobody's fool. He, however, comprehending that the message had somehow been turned to him, mastered his anger and once more became the coolly dangerous rascal. Seating himself, he growled that he would accept the belts which had been sent.

Crawford now waited to see whether the calumet would be offered him. He was confident that this acquiescence from Maclish had settled the matter of the message, but he depended on the two Dacotah to get him and Frontin safely away, as he had implied to them. Sight of the Star of Dreams had confused the whole issue for the two chieftains.

They were in no haste, those redskins; this affair was so extraordinary that they were somewhat at a loss. Finally Standing Bull got the pipe stuffed, and held a brand to it. When the pipe was lighted, he puffed ceremoniously to the winds, the sun and the earth. His companion did likewise—and the pipe was then handed to Crawford.

So far, the game was won.

While Frontin smoked in turn, then handed the pipe back, Maclish sat waiting, intent and narrow-eyed, fully aware by this time of his own impotence. The pipe was refused him, and he knew what this meant. It was doubtful if the Stone Men were yet aware that the three whites had gone to the islet. Maclish would be in sharp jeopardy unless he were careful, so the burly Scot bottled up his anger and settled down to play his game.

Laying aside the pipe, Standing Bull now came to his feet. He put a hand beneath his robe and produced a belt of ordinary porcelain trade-beads, which he dropped at the feet of Maclish.

"This belt," he began, "says that the Star Woman has heard of your search for her. It says that her manitou does not love Englishmen, who are allies of the Iroquois and enemies of our father Onontio at Montreal."

Standing Bull produced a second belt of the same material, turned to the circle of dead men, and laid that belt across the knees of the Assiniboine chieftain, whom he addressed.

"This second belt is for the Stone Men; let their eyes look upon it, let their ears be opened to it! It says that their manitou is bad, and therefore the Star Woman has punished them. It says that they have done wrong to befriend the English, for the Dacotah people have a French father."

Now, turning back to Maclish, Standing Bull produced a third belt—not of white porcelain this time, but a flaming crimson belt of valuable wampum shells, which he dropped before the Scot.

"This third belt is for you, Red Bull. It says: 'You cannot go farther; the trail is closed against you. The Star Woman knows your people for bad men and does not desire to look upon your face. Go back. If you come farther your scalp will be dried in the lodges of The Men, your skin will be stretched on the bark wall of the council house; your *manzakawan*, your iron tube in which dwells a spirit, will sit in the lodge of the Star Woman

above the lake of many stars, and will spit no more bullets.' I have spoken."

Standing Bull seated himself and drew his robe about his knees.

For a long moment, Maclish was absolutely beyond words with torrential fury. He saw now that he had been tricked into receiving these belts, which had been meant for Crawford. More, the Dacotah were openly hostile to him and friendly to Crawford, while he himself was trapped and helpless on this islet. A slight stir among the rocks betokened that at least one other red-skin lay hidden. His red features whitened and became almost livid, then crimsoned again. His breath came hoarsely. Yet he tried to master himself, his big bearded jaw jutting forth, his hands clenched until the knuckles showed white. The effort succeeded.

He moved, stirred his broad bulk, opened his wool coat and flung it off. One hand went out to the red wampum belt and drew it in; the other went to his belt and produced a long knife. With a swift motion he drove the knife through the centre of the wampum belt, which he twisted about the haft; he flung belt and knife at the feet of Standing Bull.

"There is my answer to the Star Woman," he said, and with an angry laugh rose to his feet. "So her lodge is pitched at the lake of many stars? Good. I shall come and take her as my squaw. The Stone Men shall dance with your scalps and put you into the kettle, taking your women as slaves. That is my response. As for this rascal," and he whirled on Crawford with a baleful glare,

"stand up and fight, ye vagabond rogue! Settle our affairs, as ye said, and I'll crop your ears for ye."

Crawford rose, his face very bleak and hard.

"Fight? Who said fight?" he demanded, giving Maclish a cool stare. "I've no intention of fighting with you. I said we'd settle our business—ay! But we'll not fight."

The Scot stared at him, amazed, jaw fallen in sheer astonishment.

"Eh, man? But——"

Swift as light, his careless attitude giving no warning of his intention, Crawford swung on his heel and drove his fist into the pit of the big man's stomach. It was a terrific blow, with body weight behind it. Caught all astare and unsuspecting, Maclish grunted as the breath was smashed out of him. An expression of mute agony swept into his face, and he slowly toppled forward, gasping and senseless.

"*Was-te!*" came the guttural approval of the two chiefs. Crawford, standing above the unconscious Maclish, looked at them for a moment.

"The star fights for me. Will you take us with you or not?"

"Our brother Wandering Star shall go with us, and his friend."

"This is a red bull who never gives up," and Crawford stirred the senseless Maclish with his toe. "He will lead the Stone Men after us."

"Let my brother drink his blood," said Standing Bull.

"The time for that has not come. Later on I shall kill him, but first I shall put my mark upon him, so that all

men may know that he belongs to me. If he does follow us, the Dacotah will capture him, then I shall take him and kill him."

Crawford did not scrutinize the brown faces as he said this, or he might have noted that the chiefs showed no great delight in his prediction. He took out his knife and stooped over Maclish. With deliberation, he slit the skin on that sweating, agonized forehead; when he had finished, the Scot was branded with a five-pointed star. It bled copiously.

"He has lived well, the bleeding will give him strength," said Frontin cynically. "You mistake, cap'n, not to put the knife into his heart. He promised to crop your ears."

"Let him live with this brand on him," said Crawford. "I shall find him again."

Frontin shrugged. The two red men rose and bestirred themselves. From among the rocks came a third warrior, bearing a pack of dried meat. When the three had obtained snowshoes and warbags, they took the short forest snowshoes belonging to the two dead Sauteurs, and gave these to their white companions. Frontin retrieved the muskets he had left at the shore.

"Come, my brothers!" said Standing Bull. "Even if they see us go, the Stone Men will not follow us—until after they have found their chief."

Crawford followed them to the edge of the islet, on the side farthest from the camp of the Stone Men. There, as all five came to the open ice, with the islet to cover them from sight of Maclish's men, Frontin suddenly halted.

"I'll be along in a moment, don't wait," he said, then darted back and vanished among the rocks.

The others went on. They were halfway across the open ice to the shore, when Crawford saw Frontin running and sliding after them. He was wiping his knife as he came, and Crawford turned upon him with an angry look. Frontin laughed and made answer to the tacit question.

"No, my cap'n! I did no more than crop the rogue's ears," and with this he flung two small objects on the ice. "I, too, loved Phelim Burke a little."

There were strange things beneath the shell of this dark Frontin.

CHAPTER III

TWO TRAILS MAY HAVE THE SAME END

DURING the following week, Crawford's knowledge of the Star Woman remained exactly where it had been. The Dacotah refused to talk, being troubled and uneasy in spirit. All five men were in fast and furious flight, acute peril pricking them on; although they had left the Spirit Lake safely, the Stone Men were hard on their heels. That Maclish had tricked them all, was fully appreciated.

The Dacotah envoys were not happy in the event; perhaps, under the leaden skies, they suspected that their belts had been delivered amiss. With the passing days, they began to regret some things and to ponder others. Storm had been gathering for days. The last of winter was in the air; the moon of the carp passed into that of the crane, the snow-crust was disintegrating underfoot, and the black tempest might be of either snow or rain. The Dacotah were praying for this storm to burst and save them, yet it held off—and they now considered their peril as a punishment for bringing Crawford with them.

It was not until after this week of hard marching that they took counsel with Crawford and Frontin. Both these latter were thoroughly alive to the situation. The sudden changes of direction, the spurts of speed, the stratagems, all showed that the Dacotah were desperately

striving to fling off the encircling enemy whose signal smokes rose now and again into the leaden sky. Hampered by their slower companions, the efforts of the Dacotah were futile.

When Standing Bull broke his silence, it was at the evening camp after a stiff day of marching. Overhead was lowering storm, with pines and cedars all amean in the darkness. Crawford had lost all sense of direction, had not glimpsed a soul outside their own party, and had no idea of his whereabouts; but about noon he had seen two signal-smokes to their right, and was not blind to the angry nervousness of the red men. And Standing Bull, having come to the point of speech, delivered a word that was blunt enough.

"Let my brothers open their ears," he said abruptly. "We have helped them; without our aid the Stone Men would have danced their scalps. We have done as we promised. If Wandering Star had killed the Red Bull, the Stone Men would not now be on our trail."

Crawford shrugged. Standing Bull gravely continued.

"Among the hills at the sacred lake of many stars, lives the Star Woman. She has spent the winter there with five lodges of my young men, who seek medicine before being admitted to the brotherhoods. Here is the lake," and to represent it, he drew a circle in the snow. "That lies half a moon's journey from this place." To indicate their present position, he drew a cross, orientating the diagram. "The Spirit Lake, where my brothers came to meet us, lies here." He completed his map with a black cinder, which formed a rude triangle with the other points.

This mute witness in the snow spoke eloquently enough. Crawford saw that instead of heading straight from the Spirit Lake to the Star Woman, they had come far to the south. The reason for this circumlocution was now shown by a flint which the chief took from his French firebag and laid down—the flint standing for the Assiniboinés or Stone Men, who had driven the party well off their direct course.

“Death of my life, but he should be royal cartographer!” exclaimed Frontin admiringly. “I thought that accursed Maclish was a tricky rogue. When he agreed to take us to the Spirit Lake with ten men, the sly fox tricked us—he brought down the whole pack of Assiniboinés on our heels!”

Crawford nodded, and caught an assenting gleam in the eyes of the chief. Standing Bull resumed his exposition of affairs, and swept a brown finger in the snow, well to the southward.

“Here is the country of The Men. The Spirit Woman lives far from us; she is a friend of all people, and many tribes send to her for healing or counsel. I have spent the winter in her lodge with my young men, hunting for her needs and trapping castor for the French posts. Now I must go to her swiftly with Old Bear, here,” and he indicated the third Dacotah, who was a young man despite his name. “The trail must now be forked in three ways. I go ahead with Old Bear, because my brothers cannot travel fast. Here to the south must go Yellow Sky, seeking the villages of my people, to bring a war-party against the Stone Men.”

"Oh!" Crawford perceived that he and Frontin were abandoned. "And what about us?"

Standing Bull touched Crawford's shirt, beneath which hung the Star of Dreams.

"My brother's manitou is strong. It will protect him."

Crawford's lips twitched ironically. Frontin broke into a gay laugh of mirth.

"Well touched, cap'n! Those buccaneers of Joppa said the same thing when they pitched Jonah overboard, eh? Well, they were right; and I am not so sure but that the chief here is also right!"

Crawford ignored this comment, and also disdained to argue with the Dacotah. These, obviously, were determined to abandon the white men and flee. Since one was heading south to raise a war-party, the danger must be pressing indeed. Their resolve angered him, yet he was helpless before it.

"Very well, I'll trust to the star," he said. "How shall we find this lake of many stars, since we do not know this country at all? According to this diagram, it lies northwest of us; but there are no trails in the wilderness."

"Your medicine is very strong, it will whisper in your ear," said the chief sententiously. "It will confuse the Stone Men and throw them off your trail. It will guide you——"

Crawford lost his temper at this.

"You are not warriors, but women; may the foul fiend fly away with you! Go, and the sooner the better."

Somewhat to his consternation, Standing Bull and the other two redskins instantly took him at his word; they

were very close to panic. The three caught up their packs, pulled their snowshoes from the snow, and in two minutes had melted away into the darkness.

Frontin, slow to comprehend that the Dacotah were actually departing, stared after them, then burst into a storm of bitter oaths.

"Why, the scurvy rogues mean to follow along the ice of that little river below us—leaving the enemy to swoop down on our trail in the snow! Unless we go the same way."

Crawford nodded. The Dacotah, frightened, were leaving the whites as a scalp-gift to the Stone Men; the danger, then, was imminent. He stared with sombre eyes over his pipe into the tiny fire-glow, then began to study that diagram in the snow.

"At least, they got us away from Maclish and his men," he said. "See, now! We must strike to the northwest until we reach hills; that's clear enough. This frozen river below us comes from the northwest or runs that way—sink me if I can tell which. We must take to the ice."

"And trail the Dacotah?"

"No; they'll cover their trail. Undoubtedly Maclish tricked us smoothly. When Standing Bull laid that belt over the knees of the dead Assiniboine chief, he declared war. Crafty Maclish will make the most of that, be sure! If he can persuade them to capture the Star Woman and bring the Dacotah to terms, he may yet win his game and be a second Kelsey. Well, I wish we were out of this accursed ice and snow! Winter lasts forever in this land."

"We'll be out of it when the storm breaks——"

"Unless the storm brings snow. Sly fellows, those Dacotahs! If snow comes, their tracks are covered, while we are lost. Suppose we dine."

The decamping redskins had left a fair share of dried meat, with two rabbits which hung over the fire. Crawford and Frontin quieted their hunger, then lighted pipes and smoked in silence. Crawford fully realized the difficulty of finding the Star Woman in this wilderness; the very thought was oppressive, hopeless. A fortnight of snow-travel was not only vague, but implied great distances.

"I made a mistake," he said, and at this admission Frontin shot him a look. "When I left Maclish alive, I took for granted that the Star Woman lived among the Dacotah, or close to them. So, as Maclish was bound to follow us, the future looked safe. As it now turns out, nothing is certain. Well, no matter! Have you any idea of what the month might be? I've quite lost track."

Frontin held a brand to his pipe. Then he held his hand up in air and waited a moment.

"The month is April," he said, so positively that Crawford regarded him in surprise.

"How do you know?"

"A snowflake came down on my hand, and was rain before it more than touched the skin."

A slight hiss from the embers emphasized the words, and Crawford straightened up. The storm was indeed close at hand. From the dark forest was coming a queer stir and rustle, then Crawford felt the touch of snow on his cheek. He leaped to his feet.

"Quick—our chance! If those rascals had only waited! In another hour it will be raining. Get our stuff together; we must travel along the ice until we can't lift a foot! If we go fast and far enough, the trail will be covered."

"Ah!" said Frontin. "I have just recollected something important."

"What, then?" said Crawford impatiently.

"When Standing Bull delivered that belt to Maclish, he stated where the Star Woman lived—and the red Scot caught the words."

"What of it?"

"Nothing." Frontin rose, shrugged, and smiled thinly. "These stiff moccasins! But better stiff shoes than stiff toes. Ready—belay all! I'd give a year of life to be on the ocean again."

The two men started into the darkness, feeling their way by the broken trail which the Dacotah had left. Ten minutes later they had gained the open sweep of the river below, while slushy rain pelted them and the storm burst with a rush and a wild howl.

Until past midnight they pushed on, following the river-ice; then, too spent to crawl another rod and soaked to the skin, they curled up beneath a dripping spruce and slept in utter exhaustion until the grey dawn broke. Once more forward, along the trail of the river under driving squalls of cold rain, until by afternoon they were forced to leave this easy road. The heavy rainfall, combined with sluices of melted snow from the hillsides, formed a knee-deep stream above the ice and sent them staggering through slushy snow toward higher

ground. There, amid a thick copse of trees, they dared to kindle a fire with the rusty heart of a dead birch and some dry wood from beneath an old stump; and made a shelter of boughs.

Here for two days they remained, miserable and half starved, having lost part of their meagre supplies. Further progress was impossible; the storm continued with unabated fury, pouring down wet snow or flooding all things with blinding rain. Every ravine was a foaming torrent, the lower ground was a vast morass; muskegs had become lakes, and the higher ground was still sticky with half-melted drifts of snow. A six-month of winter does not vanish in three days of rain. Their sole consolation was that the trail was swept away, and the enemy could be in no better situation. No sign of human life was visible. Finally, on the fourth morning the skies had emptied themselves, the sun came out strong and glorious, and the soaked forest began to steam. With their last food gone, the two men broke camp and set forth.

All that morning they pushed steadily toward the northwest, following a long rolling ridge which walled the valley. Sharply as they scanned sky and horizon, closely as they searched the green-banked treecrests and the farther slopes, they could detect no indication of life, no greyish trickle of ascending smoke. Yet it was unthinkable that Maclish would give up his pursuit.

Early in the afternoon Crawford, desperate for food and confident that the enemy were left far behind, knocked over a rabbit with his musket, the shot sending mighty echoes from the trees. Half an hour later the two

men built a cautious fire and made shift to cook the rabbit in the heart of a fir-thicket. Hunger partially appeased, they lighted pipes and rested while their outer moccasins, moss-stuffed, dried by the fire embers. Over his pipe Frontin evinced a growing uneasiness, and at last growled out an oath.

"I think the loneliness of this accursed wilderness has crept into my brain. I have the feeling that eyes are watching us."

Crawford flung him a sharp look. "Any reason for it?"

"None."

"We've scouted well, and the woods are open enough. If we were in Mohawk land," added Crawford thoughtfully, "it would be different; but these northern Indians are not Iroquois, and don't know how to work in Iroquois fashion."

"But they are no fools, as we know to our cost." Frontin swept the trees around with his fierce hawk-like gaze. At this instant Crawford caught the distinct "click" of a fusil brought to cock; and from close at hand a voice addressed them in French.

"Have my brothers never heard who taught the dogs of Iroquois how to hunt? Let them look through the forest. Perhaps they will see the chief of the Wolf nation."

Both men leaped to their feet. They stood gazing about, searching the trees yet finding nothing. Save for the shadowed leaf-play of the evergreens, nothing moved in the sunshine. A low laugh sounded; then, not twenty

feet distant, appeared the tall figure of an Indian who stood carefully uncocking his fusil. For a moment he regarded them in amusement, keenly gratified by their puzzled alarm, then advanced toward them. He was an old, gaunt, erect redskin of great dignity. He was unpainted, naked to the waist save for crossed baldricks which carried firebag, bullets and horn. His head was shaven to a grizzled scalplock.

"My brothers are Frenchmen; that is good," he said gravely. "My father Metaminens, who is ill, heard the sound of a gun. He sent Le Talon, a war-chief of the Wolf nation, to see who fired that gun. Come! Metaminens will smoke with you, if he is awake."

Crawford was pardonably astonished. He knew that the Loups, whom the English called Mohegans, were an almost extinct tribe, divided in allegiance between Iroquois and French. What any of them were doing in this country was problematical; also, this Le Talon conveyed in his manner an extraordinary impression. He was no common warrior.

"He wears a crucifix at his girdle," commented Frontin. "You'll go?"

"Of course." Crawford addressed the Mohegan chief. "Has Le Talon seen anything of other men near by?" A shake of the head made answer, and Crawford continued. "We are pursued by the Stone Men. The storm has thrown them off, but if they pick up our trail, it will mean danger to you and your father Metaminens."

The wrinkled brown face of the old warrior flashed in a quick, scornful laugh.

"One who has taken many Iroquois scalps does not fear wandering dogs of the west. Our camp is not a mile from here. Do you come?"

Crawford nodded, and signed for the chief to lead the way. As he and Frontin fell in behind, he flung a quick word at his friend.

"All these Mohegans are wandering devils, loving intrigue and war above aught else, and we can't afford to pass by the chance. They may know this country, or may be glad to come with us. Besides, there is an air of mystery about this chief."

"And who has more curiosity than a woman—unless it be a man?" said Frontin ironically.

Crawford soon found himself hard taxed to keep the pace set by the old Mohegan chief, who glided among the trees like a shadow, making no more sound than a shadow, and whose flitting figure had all the mottled impermanence of a shadow as it passed from opening to opening. These Mohegans were beyond question friends; probably hunters or traders who had wandered up from the French posts on Lake Superior or the Mississippi.

When it came to fighting or trailing, two of them would be worth more than a score of Crees.

Presently the old chieftain lifted his head and flung up a sharp wolf-howl.

"That is my brother Chaudière Noire," he grunted, as a response came from farther ahead. "Black Kettle waits at the fire of our father Metaminens."

Three Mohegans, then! So much the better, thought Crawford, knowing what grim warriors were these men whom even the Mohawks deemed worthy of adoption and

alliance. Their very presence in this wilderness was proof of their worth.

Presently they came to a rivulet which ran thigh-deep with icy water. Plunging through this torrent of melted snow, Le Talon came to an abrupt halt on the farther brink. From the bushes above him emerged a figure, stripped to the waist, scalplock greased, face painted; this was Black Kettle, a younger man than his companion. He spoke briefly to Le Talon.

The sickness is on Metaminens. He sleeps. Be careful not to waken him."

Crawford made a sign of assent, then followed Black Kettle and Le Talon into a marshy thicket of spruce saplings, where the muskeg quivered like jelly underfoot. In the midst of this thicket, perfectly screened from all discovery, was a brush shelter covering a blanketed figure. Caribou meat hung drying over a small fire. Packs of goods were near by.

All four halted to gaze at the sick man. Crawford stepped forward—then repressed an exclamation of amazement. This man, whom the Mohegans in their own fashion of speech had termed "father," was a white man! Now, in the midst of his amazement, Crawford caught a mutter of feverish delirium from the invalid, and turned. He drew Le Talon to one side and spoke quietly, swiftly, Frontin joining them.

"What does this mean? Who is this man?"

"He is Metaminens," was the surprised response. "In the great lodge of Onontio at Montreal he is called *Sieur Nicholas Perrot*, but throughout the frontier he is *Metaminens*—*Little Indian Corn*—the bringer of peace whose

canoe is always filled with ransomed captives. Who are you, that you have not heard this name?"

"I have heard it," said Crawford, and dark Frontin whistled softly.

Heard it, indeed! Who had not heard that name, so blackly cursed by the English, so adoringly revered by voyageur and engagé of the French! And here, delirious and helpless, beyond aid or comfort, lay the explorer and first opener of the west, the man who had saved to Canada all her western empire—the famous Nicholas Perrot.

"We must get him out of here at once," said Crawford decisively. "In this marsh he will die, for fever is on him. Give us some food and we will talk."

They were soon wolfing some of the caribou meat. Crawford had already made up his mind what course to take, for it was impossible to abandon *Sieur Perrot*. So the four men squatted at one side of the little opening among the trees, and Crawford talked.

He told the Mohegans how he had come hither and what he sought, showed them the star at his throat, spoke briefly as possible—for the afternoon was fast drawing on. He was startled by the utter stupefaction of the two redskins at his words; sight of the Star of Dreams brought a wondering awe into their eyes. They were far too courteous to interrupt him, however, and sat in grave silence while he told them the present situation; none the less, a certain blaze of excitement was in their eyes.

"We must take instant decision," he concluded. "*Sieur Perrot* is in grave danger here, both from fever and from

the Stone Men. Are other men with you? Is any post near by?"

"No," said Le Talon. "We are in strange country. We came from Montreal, with Metaminens."

"Last summer?"

"No. We came by canoe to the Nottawasaga, for the streams were open. Here in the north they were closed, and we came on by the ice to this spot."

Crawford stared at them. "A journey before the rivers were open—why, it was madness! What caused your trip? What is Sieur Perrot doing in this country?"

The two Mohegans glanced at each other, exchanged a nod, and Le Talon continued. In the brown faces was a quiet excitement, an air of keen suspense.

"Long years ago, before my father Metaminens carried a grey scalplock, he met a woman in the lodges of the Dacotah. In those days Metaminens was Commandant of the West, and ruled for Onontio. Also, he was a chief among the Dacotah; he was the first white man to visit them and bring them trade. Now Metaminens is old, and his scalplock is grey. His manitou has whispered to him that he must seek this woman again. We, his children, came with him. That is all."

Crawford frowned, guessing that the chief was leading up to some surprise.

"A woman? But the lodges of the Dacotah are not in this direction!"

"Metaminens seeks the Star Woman," said Le Talon bluntly.

A sardonic smile touched the lips of Frontin. Craw-

ford, after a slight start of surprise, regarded the Mohegans; in their intent gaze he read a vivid eagerness, a breathless suspense—for they were waiting to see how this tale would affect him.

That they told the truth was indubitable. He could not question the fact, incredible as it seemed—Perrot, like himself, had come seeking this Star Woman! More, it appeared that Sieur Perrot had actually known her in days past. Well, that was possible enough; he knew that this explorer had been the one to tell Iberville about the Star Woman. And at this, a sudden wonder seized upon him.

“Metaminens told about this Star Woman to Pierre le Moyne d’Iberville,” he said slowly. “And Iberville told me—hence I am here. A strange business, a strange business!”

The Indians stared at him in awe, knowing well the name of Iberville and the man himself; but Frontin laughed softly, thinly.

“Strange? Not at all, cap’n! *Mort de ma vie*, we are going to have some interesting times ahead, you and I and Perrot—and Maclish!”

Crawford frowned darkly.

CHAPTER IV

HE WHO DENIES THE INCREDIBLE DENIES GOD

IN the silence that followed spoke up Black Kettle, who was less restrained than the elder chief.

"If the Star Woman knew that Metaminens came to seek her, then her heart would be glad. She would send her spirit to make him well. She would send her young men to meet him."

At this hint, Crawford woke up. Why not, indeed? He seized the opening and asserted himself, for that was Hal Crawford's way. His orders were decisive, and were entirely unquestioned, for the Mohegans were accustomed to the guidance of a white man.

"Good. Two of us must remain here to move camp and tend Sieur Perrot; that will be perilous enough. The other two must travel to the Star Woman and send back her young men to help, and this will be equally dangerous. Settle between yourselves which is to go. Frontin, you understand the affair? Clip two sticks and arrange it. Long stick goes, short stays here. There must be no delay."

Frontin comprehended perfectly. There was no question of abandoning the helpless Perrot, the Mohegans were invaluable allies, and a separation was inevitable. Either of them, with one of the Mohegans, could reach the Star Woman in half the time it would otherwise take them.

Frontin whipped out his knife, clipped two twigs, and prepared them. He enclosed them in his hand with the ends showing even, and held them out. Crawford leaned forward and drew one. Frontin opened his hand and showed the other—and both were of equal length. At this, the two Mohegans laughed softly.

"All right, old friend," said Crawford. "I choose to stay."

Frontin leaped up. "Which of you goes with me, Loups?"

"I go." Le Talon rose. "My brother Black Kettle has hurt his foot. Come!"

The two shook their powder-horns, examined firebags, divided meat and bullets. In five minutes they were ready.

"Take care of the star, cap'n," said Frontin. Then he added, in his assumed cynicism, "*Ora pro nobis!*"

The next moment, with a wave of his hand, he vanished among the trees in the wake of Le Talon. The two were gone.

Crawford and Black Kettle fell hastily to work, since there was much to be done ere nightfall. Perrot, fast bound in fever, was tossing and moaning. After locating a sheltered and hidden spot on a hillside, they carried him to it; there was a bed of pine boughs to be laid, a shelter to be constructed, precious dry wood to be uncovered and collected. The packs had to be moved and the fire-embers transferred. In all this Black Kettle was at a disadvantage, for he had twisted his ankle badly and walking was painful.

Crawford resigned himself to this delay, the more easily

because of the singular coincidence which had brought him and Perrot together. Or was it coincidence? He had come from the northeast, Perrot from the southeast, roughly aiming at a mutual point; why, then, should they not have met before reaching that point? It was natural enough.

During two full days he devoted himself to caring for the sick man. Black Kettle scouted and reported no sign of any foe in forest or on horizon. During these two days, Crawford pondered the reason for Perrot's presence here. The Mohegan explanation, that his manitou had impelled the action, was absolutely accurate; but Crawford was slow to accept it. *Sieur Perrot* was an example of the ingratitude of princes, since he occupied no position in Canada. He had no official reason to be here, then.

These thirty years, Nicholas Perrot had sowed where other men had reaped. No other Frenchman had his influence among the western tribes. His very name of *Little Indian Corn* spoke of the godhead with which the Green Bay tribes had endowed this first white man to come among them. Since 1665 he had blazed the trails where others walked to wealth and fame. To the red men, he was always known as the sun-bringer. Where others fanned hot sparks of wrath, Perrot had made peace, composed quarrels, kept the tribes in alliance to Onontio. And now he sought the *Star Woman*—why? In the end, Crawford renewed this question to Black Kettle, and received a story whose implications left him thoughtful.

"My brother, I will tell you what I know," said the Mohegan gravely. "It is now more than thirty winters

since my father Metaminens went among the Iowa and the Dacotah nations. There he met this Star Woman, who saved his life. What passed between them, I do not know. My father Metaminens saw her only once or twice, yet he has often spoken of her. My brother, there are two roads open to every man, of which the one ends always, soon or late, at the grave; but Metaminens has never followed that road. Does my brother understand?"

Crawford nodded. He was startled by the unexpected depth of thought in this redskin, by the dignified significance of these last words. Black Kettle continued.

"Always the Star Woman has sent her manitou to watch over Metaminens. Perhaps he met her again in the west, when he was Commandant; I do not know. He has often told of how her spirit saved him from danger, how her influence was exerted to help him in time of trouble, how her power among the western tribes aided him. No other white man has seen the Star Woman. This is all I know."

Was this some old romance, then? Crawford frowned thoughtfully.

"Do you know what this Star Woman looks like?"

"She has hair of gold, and blue eyes, and wears a great star of blue stones."

An exclamation of astonishment burst from Crawford. Thus had Moses Deakin described his vision in the witch-fluid! Yet it was impossible that he should have seen her thus, exactly as Perrot had seen her thirty years ago. No, undoubtedly he had heard Perrot's description of her—this would account for the seeming wonder.

Crawford slept upon the matter, and in the morning found himself still perplexed. He looked at Perrot, found

the latter sleeping easily and naturally. Black Kettle had been gone for an hour or more, seeking fresh meat, and Crawford now stole away to get a new stock of wood, which had to be chosen carefully if the fire were to be smokeless.

In half an hour he returned with his burden. He dropped this by the fire, straightened up—and found Perrot on one elbow, staring at him. Those clear and penetrating eyes, looking out at him from the white-bearded face, were sane. Crawford poured out some hot broth, and knelt beside the invalid.

“This first, then talk if you must,” he said. Perrot obeyed, then sank back and scrutinized him in frank wonder. Crawford lighted his pipe and sat down.

“Where are the Mohegans?” demanded Perrot.

Crawford puffed and considered this question, which contained many unuttered queries. His patient was weak, but well enough to talk, and would only fret if left unanswered. So Crawford began to speak, and went on to relate the most essential parts of his own tale. While he talked, the gaze of Perrot devoured him and mirrored the man’s inner mind; the Frenchman passed from amazement to incredulity, and then to a slow but still more amazed credence.

In his younger days this man, who by dint of his personality alone had conquered whole tribes, who had walked unarmed into a council-lodge of hostile Ottawas and had taken captives from the very torture stake, had shown himself a very Odysseus in craft and guile; but he had also shown that he could be all things to all men in a most astonishing degree. So it was now. Once con-

vinced of Crawford's story, comprehending what manner of man this was, he attempted no dissimulation but met frankness with frankness. When the tale was done, he uttered a shaky laugh and asked to see the Star of Dreams. Crawford displayed the jewel, and Perrot nodded.

"Thanks be to the saints!" he said slowly. "I perceive now why I came into this land. You see, my friend, I knew not the reason. Something urged me to the trip, something forced me despite myself. With men like you and me, men who obey the hidden voice of the spirit, some reason always discloses itself. Me, I am a religious man, as the good fathers at Green Bay have cause to know, yet I also have some belief in the manitou of the red men. I thought it was only a desire to see the Star Woman again which drew me, but in truth it was something greater and more definite. And the same with you."

Crawford smiled, not comprehending this very clearly.

"Not in the least, *Sieur Perrot*. I am here only because of my whim."

"No, my friend." Perrot spoke gravely. "We are agents of the unseen destiny which guards this empire of the wilderness—remember that! It is a stern taskmaster, this destiny; it demands much of one's spirit and body. Me, I believe in this unseen destiny."

"I do not believe in the incredible," said Crawford.

"He who denies the incredible," came Perrot's voice, "must then deny God."

Crawford started slightly. "I cannot answer that, *Sieur Perrot*," he said simply. "I think you may have the right

of it. What, then, do you assign as the reason for our presence in this place?"

"Ah, but we are here for France!" Perrot's voice gathered strength, and a swift flash leaped into his eyes. "I struck axe into earth at Michillimackinac and took all that region for France. I did the same at Saint Anthony's Falls, in the far west. With your help, I shall do the same here——"

"Not with my help," intervened Crawford coolly. "I take no land for France, and I have no interest in the matter. I shall stop Maclish because he murdered Phe-lim Burke; I was a fool not to kill the dog when I could have done so, but we all make mistakes. I desire to find the Star Woman—why? Because she is unknown, inaccessible, a mystery! That's all. So you have come to do the errands of King Louis, eh?"

"Not at all," replied Perrot, studying him. "I came because I was drawn by the spirit; and now I see that work is awaiting me. Maclish—Maclish! This man must be defeated in his aim. The Stone Men and the Dacotah must be restrained from war. You, who know not why you came hither—oh, the mad humour of it! Have you, like Maclish, some dream of marrying the Star Woman?"

"Heaven forbid!" Crawford laughed a little. "If you knew her thirty years ago, she's no slender lass now. Besides, I've put the world behind me, Perrot. I've rotted in irons, I've had my moments of happiness and of tears; now it's dead. I want to go over the horizon, wander on to the end while there are things to be done and seen. That's all."

Perrot eyed him with a singular expression, partly cynical, partly sad. Then it seemed as though a veil dropped over the man's thoughts. There was something deep in his mind, some mystery, which he had been about to explain; he refrained. Instead, he came to one elbow.

"Look!" he exclaimed. "Play your own hand; you are a man whom I could love, and you do not interfere with me. As for me, I shall do what is given me to do. Here is my mission—I must turn Maclish's game back upon him. Maclish, the blind fool, has an awakening ahead of him! He thinks to seize the Star Woman, make peace between Stone Men and Dacotah, and get all the inland trade for the bay. It is an idle dream, but I shall utilize it, you comprehend? Me, I shall prevent the seizure, confirm the peace between these tribes, and draw the trade of the Stone Men to the Lake Superior posts. France shall have a new empire here in the northwest!"

"Another idle dream." Crawford shook his head. "They are too firmly wedded to the English—but play your own game, and I'll play mine. So the Star Woman is not young, eh?"

Perrot veiled his gaze. "How should she be?" he said evasively. "I saw her thirty years ago, and again a few years later. Are many of the Dacotah with her?"

"A few lodges only."

"She is a great medicine woman, living off to herself by this lake of many stars. She is a healer, a communer with the good God, to whom the chiefs and medicine men go for advice. It may be blasphemous, but I think she is little short of a saint, my friend."

Crawford did not reply.

He began to perceive why this man, despite his great deeds, was still simple *Sieur Perrot* instead of being a great seigneur. Here was a man of action, yes; but behind that a dreamer, a visionary. He had now conceived a vague scheme not half so coherent as that which *Mac-lish* was pursuing. *Perrot* was a fanatic on the question of winning the west to France; and those who sat in high places, having all the wilderness country they could well handle already, wanted none of his plans. So now, driving off into the northwest, *Perrot* was only too eager to grasp at the work which he conceived to be awaiting his hand.

Suddenly and without a sound, *Black Kettle* appeared in the clearing and set down the hind quarters of a caribou. He stood erect, his eyes flickering to *Perrot*, and grunted.

"My father *Metaminens* is awake—good! I crossed the trail of three Stone Men and heard them talking. One they call *Red Bull* is following, with three-score young men. They have English muskets. They are going to take the *Star Woman* as a wife for *Red Bull*."

To this *Perrot* sat up. "Give me food, for to-morrow we must abandon our packs and travel."

Crawford shrugged, deeming travel on the morrow an impossibility.

Yet, incredible as it seemed, *Sieur Nicholas Perrot* was on his feet the next morning; before breakfast he was shaven, dressed and ready to depart. *Crawford* held his peace, for he realized that *Perrot* would regard no reason, and in this he was right. He was not right in thinking *Perrot's* ambitious scheme impossible, however. Crafty old *Perrot* knew the redskins better than any other white

man alive, knew his own ability, and was entirely competent to bring his dream to fruition if he had the chance.

For thirty years Perrot had been encountering men like Maclish, and had one by one left them defeated behind him. For thirty years Metaminens had ruled the western tribes, compelling them from war to peace. No other man was like him or would be like him again, in this singular influence which he exerted.

The packs were cached away and the three men set forth, carrying only arms and food. Perrot started off gaily enough, but within two hours he was staggering from exhaustion. Deaf to all protests, he drove ahead by dint of his iron will alone. The woods were silent and deserted, no sign of life appeared, but now Crawford knew that Maclish and the Stone Men were not many miles distant.

It was close to noon when Perrot silently collapsed in his tracks. And now Crawford, aiding the Mohegan to cut pine-boughs and make camp, felt his last hope gone. For days to come the old rover could only nurse back strength, and was out of the game. Even did Standing Bull send help, even did Frontin and Le Talon reach the Star Woman, what could be expected from them? Nothing. Crawford felt that in this vast wilderness three wandering men could not be located. The immensity of the country smote him and weighed him down. And meantime, he knew, Maclish was sweeping the war-party forward.

So, when he had done what he could for Sieur Perrot, Crawford lighted his pipe and stared gloomily through the smoke, being tempted of the devil to leave his com-

panions and plunge into the wilderness alone. He had no sympathy with Perrot's ambitions. He wanted to be on his way to Frontin, pushing his quest for the Star Woman; to sit here doing nothing was maddening. The spur of freedom was goading him roughly. When he was playing a lone hand, dependent only on himself, he was happiest—there was his tragedy, if you like. Yet he could not gainsay the urge, and this news of Maclish was like a thorn in his flesh.

Now, while Crawford smoked and pondered temptation, and the Mohegan picked over dry wood, and Perrot lay in exhausted coma, there came quavering up through the trees from far away a thin, queer cry. That high cry sent a shiver over Crawford, for it was foreign to his limited northland experience, with its uncanny cadence of shaking mirth, its hint of weird and unearthly laughter. He had never before heard the call of a loon. Black Kettle stood like a dog pointing birds, but for a very different reason; the Mohegan had never before heard the call of a loon at high twelve.

"What was that?" asked Crawford. Black Kettle wrinkled up his nose.

"That," he said, putting hand to powder-horn, "was the cry of a bird, which came from the throat of a man."

Crawford saw that the redskin was puzzled and alarmed, so asked no more questions. He loaded and primed his gun, and came to his feet. Once again that strange cry reached them, and this time it was much closer. Crawford distinctly saw the Mohegan shiver to the sound of it, as though reading something singular and terrible in the cry.

Black Kettle gestured. Crawford followed him out from camp among the trees. He soon realized that the other was retracing their trail of the morning; it was an easy one to follow, because of Perrot's heavily plunging tracks. A third time lifted that quavering call, now so close upon them that Black Kettle made a startled gesture and vanished from sight among the trees. Crawford waited, peering through the dead brown masses of a fallen pine.

A moment of waiting—then a man came into sight, following the trail. But what a man! He was a misshapen Indian, with a huge head set between wide shoulders, a shaven scalp, and a fearful caricature of a face; it was the distorted countenance of an idiot. His dress was peculiar and remarkable, being composed of snake-skins sewn over hide, the heads hanging intact. Once seen, this hideous creature could never be forgotten—and perhaps this fact was the reason for such a costume. The wilderness is a stickler for simple and logical causes of apparently remarkable effects.

Although he certainly could not see either of the hidden men, the demented redskin now came to a sudden halt. He peered around, lifted that horrible countenance, and sniffed the air. A loose grin came to his lips. He spoke aloud in a mingled Cree and English which was comprehensible to Crawford.

"Where are you, Wandering Star? I bring you a talking bark, a message from afar. I am Singing Loon, and no man harms me because my medicine is very strong. The Stone Men are afraid to hurt me. Where are you, Wandering Star? I can smell you close by. I have fol-

lowed your trail a long way from the lodges of the Crees."

This, in effect, was one of those unhappy beings whom the red men believed touched by the Great Spirit, and from whom they shrank in fear and awe; none of them, at any cost, would lift a finger to harm this man. Crawford did not hesitate, but laid down his gun and stepped out to face the messenger.

"So here you are, Wandering Star!"

The idiot grinned. How he recognized Crawford was a mystery; yet, at the creature's girdle, Crawford saw one of his own old and cast-off moccasins, and caught that sniffing gesture again. Did this imbecile, then, have some remarkable gift of scent? Perhaps.

"Here is my message for you." Singing Loon fumbled beneath his snake-skins and produced a roll of birchbark. "I smell another man hidden, but he will not hurt me. You should have seen how the Stone Men ran away when they saw me yesterday! Now I shall go and frighten them again."

Giving the birch roll into Crawford's hand, the chuckling idiot turned and disappeared at a shambling but rapid run.

Crawford stood transfixed, gripped by the wonder of it—the way this creature had come straight to him amid the wilderness! It was almost past his comprehension; but to the Mohegan it was not at all incredible. Black Kettle came into sight, crossed himself twice like the good Christian he was, and stepped forward.

"I did well not to fire. That man has a powerful spirit. What did he say?"

"He brought me a message."

"His spirit knew where to find you. Good."

Crawford unrolled the stiff bark. Words had been scrawled on the inner surface of the bark, scrawled there with a sharpened bullet. They were not easy to decipher, some of them were lost; but he knew that Art Bocagh had been one of Phelim Burke's Irishmen, able to read and write in English.

"The Kriqs have us saff. The Saxons are dead. The Scots red men slue themm. Fower of us live. Wee goe to Ft. Nue Sevann. Art Bocagh."

Keen news, this, from Art the Lamé! Instead of sending Crawford's men to the coast, Maclish had ordered the Assiniboines to slaughter them. Four of the Irish had somehow escaped and were safe among the Crees, on their way to New Severn—one of the two posts remaining to the English on the bay. Art Bocagh had sent this word that Crawford might be warned against Maclish, and might know where to find the remnant of his men if ever he returned.

"The murdering hound!" said Crawford. A swirl of hatred swept up in his heart. Something burst within him—all his restraint was gone, all his self-control, all his cold caution. He whirled on Black Kettle, a blaze in his blue eyes. "You shall look after Metaminens—he needs only food and rest. This message says that Red Bull has murdered my men. I am going on ahead of him, past him, over him, to find the Star Woman—and to find him, also!"

The Mohegan regarded him steadily, then made indirect protest.

"My white brother is very angry. Does his manitou tell him that anger is a good companion on such a trail?"

Crawford snarled an oath. The murder of his men was the last straw. Every atom of his cold reserve was swept away.

"If I find that dog Maclish I'll slit his throat instead of his face, this time! What about you and Perrot? Will the Stone Men follow that idiot here?"

"No," said the Mohegan. "They are not coming this way. They are north of us."

"You'll be safe if the Dacotah war-party finds you, then?"

"My father Metaminens is a chief of the Dacotah."

"Then farewell."

The Mohegan grunted in reply. Pausing only to retrieve his musket, Crawford plunged into the trees, with hatred of Maclish burning like a living flame in his heart.

CHAPTER V

VENGEANCE RUNS A RED ROAD

IT helped much that Hal Crawford had hunted with Mohawks and had worked his way during these frozen months across an unknown wilderness. Now, heading into the northwest, he had need of all his woods lore, all his hard iron strength, all his sheer fighting frenzy.

Of this last he had no lack; indeed, his mood was little short of actual madness, and the more he thought about that note from Art Bocagh, the more infuriated he became. He cared much less about himself than about the men who trusted him. The murder of Phelim Burke had formed his resolution to torture Maclish to the uttermost; but the treacherous slaughter of his men smashed this resolution, wakened in him a furious resolve to kill the burly Scot at the first chance, and in default of him, those who followed him.

During two days and nights he pressed through unbroken woods, throwing caution to the winds, driven by the insurgence of cold fury which had become his reckless master. With the third morning, all the sky was black with magnificent stormclouds massing up from the south—huge silver-edged billows, pile upon pile and turret upon turret, ranked before and behind as though spelling the immensity of the heavens and spanning that awful depth into the infinity beyond. Stillness abode in the air that morning, a dreadful and expectant stillness of nature,

though now and again the cedars shook to the distant mutter of crepitant thunder.

Midway of the morning, Crawford struck into the trail of the Assiniboine war-party and followed it furiously. Toward noon, lightning began to streak across the dark heavens, and rain threatened at every moment. Just as the first breath of the rain-bearing wind was felt, a tremendous thunderbolt crashed into the trees a half mile distant. Hard upon that peeling reverberation, Crawford loped into a small opening and ran slap upon two Stone Men standing above a dead deer; the roar of the thunderbolt had drowned the sound of the shot.

They saw Crawford ere he sighted them. One of the two flung up musket and let fire, the second hurriedly reloading empty gun. Crawford had no time to prime and fire. Dropping his own gun as the slugs whistled over his head, he whipped out knife and tomahawk, and the keen little axe whirled in air like a streak of vivid light. This was a new weapon-play to the Stone Men, and the Mohawk cast split scalplock and skull of the first. The second warrior was ready with his knife, but Crawford smote him terribly; and two men lay under the singing pines with a reeking five-point star slit in each brown forehead.

The pines were singing now, sure enough; the storm hurtled down with a howl of wind to shake the high trees, torrents of rain blurring the horizon, thunder volleying and rumbling over the black sky. The back of winter had broken in storm, and now was come a second and greater upheaval of nature to complete the work. Through the thick of it drove Crawford, on his trail, disregarding all precaution, until in the midst of the after-

noon he was brought to swift sanity. Somewhere wood smoke fought against rain and wind, and catching the pleasant reek of it, he regained his lost caution.

He sniffed the fragrance of birch and cedar, paused to get direction, found the richer scent of fresh meat abroil, and scouted the nostriled warning until he came upon the camp of the Stone Men, lying below him on a long hillside. There were the sodden warriors huddled about fires, others bringing in game, muskets piled near by with powder-horns protected against the wet by blankets. Over all lifted the roaring blast of the storm, the thundering pæan of destruction that swept earth and sky, and between the bursts of rain and wind broke livid and ghastly leven-flashes.

Men paused cowering in this stour, and Crawford might have circled the camp and gone on his way had he not caught sight of Maclish stalking about. Sight of the man brought up Crawford's gun, but he found that by some carelessness his powder-horn had come unstopped and was empty. With an oath he flung it away, hurled the musket after it, and settled down to wait.

The storm raged on more fiercely, then gradually lessened as evening approached. When twilight fell the rain had become a steady downpour, the thunder had crept across the horizon, and Crawford was stealing down toward the glimmering fires, the noise of his approach drowned by the streaming swish of the rain. All too well was it drowned, in fact. Crawford was not a rod from the fires and the piled muskets, when an Assiniboine coming in with a load of wood went stumbling over him, and let out one startled howl ere the tomahawk took his life.

Upon this, Crawford leaped down the hillside, a wild and dripping figure streaking down the slope in great bounds. The redskins raised frightened yells and broke in mad panic. In this confusion of shouts and rain-blurred figures, Crawford lost all sight of Maclish. Fury spurring him, he gained the nearest fire, scattered it, and sent the brands whirling in among the powder-horns—brand after brand, whirling and smoking and bursting into flame again with the fall. Next instant Crawford was away, heading blindly into the darkness, while the bellow of Maclish was drowned in the bursting explosion of the black sands of death. Then, as Crawford darted into the gloom, he lifted his head and sent up the fearful blood-yell which even to these far redskins was known in all its dread implication—the Mohawk war whoop.

"Sassakouay!" he shrilled it, and again. *"Kouay! Sassakouay!"*

Leaving that token to chill their blood, he struck out across the wet night. No man could follow this unseen trail with any speed; dripping branches slapped him as he ran, trees were thick, the darkness was impenetrable; yet Crawford kept going after a fashion. He had failed to smite Maclish, but in the destruction of their powder he had dealt the enemy a shrewd enough blow.

Hour after hour he kept going forward, until toward dawn he halted and burrowed for shelter. He wakened with sun in his eyes and found the day clear as crystal, windless, incredibly warm; spring was at hand in the north, and the snows nearly cleared from the ground.

Now Crawford made good progress, unarmed save for knife and axe, intent upon keeping ahead of the Stone Men,

speeding toward the northwest. With afternoon, however, he made a frightful discovery. A musket-shot crashed out somewhere to his left, and two minutes later a wounded deer broke cover almost beside him, swerved in hot panic, and darted off. Crawford dropped from sight, in time to see an Assiniboine warrior pass on the trail of the beast.

Crawford followed, driven now by hunger. When he heard the finishing shot, he ran in swiftly and caught the warrior with empty rifle. The axe-throw missed, the red-skin sent up a long yell among the trees, knife clashed on knife; the end of this matter was that the body of the slain deer tripped his slayer, which was crude justice enough. Presently Crawford took up his trail again, bearing a load of fresh meat.

He was now cognizant of his danger—knew that he was between the main body of the Stone Men and their outflung advance parties. By next morning, these had picked up his trail. Smokes went up far and near, while Crawford fled steadily on into the northwest, gaining rougher and more open country, covering ground rapidly. The signal smokes died away. During two days he pressed on at top speed, saw no further signs of the enemy, and began to feel certain that he had flung off all pursuit.

Then, abruptly, fate tripped him.

Crawford was following a steep hillside and came to a broad scar where earth and trees had been riven away to form a drop of twenty feet. As he skirted the verge of this little chasm, a stick flew up between his legs. Crawford fell forward, the loosened earth gave way, and he was sent plunging headfirst with a small avalanche of

earth and boulders. His descent came to crashing stop, and the senses were knocked out of him.

When he wakened, it was hard upon sunset, and a stunning sense of unreality oppressed him, for voices were sounding close at hand. Crawford found himself unable to move, buried nearly to the shoulders in loose earth and gravel. He looked up, and a species of paralysis seized on him at what he saw—not ten feet from him were five men, four of them Assiniboine warriors, and the fifth Maclish!

Crawford stared. He saw that all five were weary and hard-run, and realized that they had been following his trail. Thus far, they had not seen him, but discovery was inevitable. Sight of Maclish somewhat gratified him. Those cropped ears did not show for the long hair that now covered them, but the starry scar on the forehead was ineradicable. Phelim Burke was somewhat avenged, for Crawford could clearly read the changes in the face of Maclish, the things stamped there since his last sight of the man. Bestiality had come forth, stark animal fury—that branded star had stung him deeper than any other wound could have done. Spent as were his four warriors, he still seemed vigorous. He was striding up and down, as they tore at their food, and shook one red fist at the encircling forest.

“I’ll have ye yet, ye souple deil!” he muttered. “Mark Maclish, will ye? I’ll put marks on ye that the fiend himself will look twice at! I’ll——”

The whitish eyes of Maclish fell upon the head and shoulders of Crawford protruding from the hillside talus.

For one moment the man stood petrified—then, with a bellow to his men, hurled himself forward.

And thus was Hal Crawford trapped and taken.

Now, Maclish was not a man of wisdom, but of mere animal cunning. Into the Stone Men he had injected his own dream of capturing the Star Woman and thus forcing the Dacotah to a humiliating peace. That is, the younger men were so minded, for the older men of the tribe did not care to meddle with the Star Woman; but the smashing personality of Maclish drew all the more reckless warriors after him in torrential enthusiasm.

Had Maclish been wise, he would have sent back for his main force and awaited their arrival to attend to his prisoner. He could not do this. He was wildly exultant, striding back and forth, cursing Crawford furiously, roaring forth orders and raging like a madman in his triumph. The four Stone Men with him, nothing loath, readily gave up their rest for a more exciting pastime, and were glad to have the sport all to themselves. They gathered wood and heaped the fire until it became that rarest of things in Indian country—a crackling pillar of light, illumining all things distinctly, the ruddy reflection glinting against the carpet of the sky until it was visible for miles. Perhaps Maclish counted that it would bring his outflung scouting parties to the scene.

Crawford was dragged forward to two saplings standing six feet apart. He was lashed by each wrist to one of the saplings. The thongs about his ankles were then cut—and a warrior went staggering with a howl of agony as Crawford's foot caught him squarely in the throat.

"So ye had to give a blow, eh?" Maclish came forward,

pawing his red beard, and those glittering eyes of his devoured the captive. "Ye'll dance for that! Try a kick on me if ye dare, and I'll punch out an eye for ye!"

He bared his knife. Knowing the threat would be made good, Crawford stood quiet. Maclish came to him, ripped with hand and knife, and stripped Crawford naked to the waist. Then, with a chuckle, Maclish grasped the Star of Dreams and snatched it savagely away.

"A bonny toy!" he said softly, gloatingly, and thrust it into a pocket. Then he looked at Crawford and grinned. "You'll have more than a pair o' cropped ears when I'm done with ye. Put your mark on me, eh? Now, ye dog, I'll have payment!"

He turned, bellowed an order at his redskins.

Crawford stood in silence. He had felt the thongs give slightly about his right wrist, guessed that he had been lashed with frayed snowshoe lacings, and took heart. After all, he might yet go down fighting! Phelim Burke's words came back to him, and the warning of Frontin, "Keep the Star safe!" The Star was lost now, and it seemed that this loss spelled his ruin. Hopelessness surged in upon him—then he cast off the feeling and became again himself. What was the Star, after all, but a thing of metal and stone?

The Stone Men were gathering more wood, and gleefully laying it in a circle about the captive and the saplings—a wide circle, not too close, as Maclish directed them. Crawford worked at those right-hand thongs, unobserved, and presently felt them snap. His wrist came free, so that he swiftly gripped the sapling to keep the fact from being noticed. This small freedom gave him no

advantage, for he was weaponless and could not release his other hand, stretched high to the left-hand sapling. His heart sank, and hope fled again.

With their circle of brush completed, the Stone Men now brought flaming brands from the blazing pyre and set them into the brush, which crept into quick flame. They stood off, and with jeer and taunt began to goad the captive, using the few English words they knew, while Maclish held up the Star of Dreams and bellowed imprecations.

The flaming circle grew, and became a torture-ring that surrounded Crawford with hot radiance. Not waiting for the victim to be roasted, one of the eager redskins now came leaping in, bearing a longer brand from the fire, and began to buffet the helpless man with this. The other three joined in this play, leaping in and out of the fiery circle. Their brands smote Crawford across breast and back, and set sparks to his woollen breeches. He clung to the saplings, half suffocated, his body flinching from the brands, fire sweeping through his veins; the circle of brush was all clear flame, the heat of it intolerable.

Then one of the redskins came close—and he had his chance. Loosing his frenzied grip on the sapling, Crawford sent his free right hand to the red throat. A howl went up, a chorus of wild yells and oaths; the others stared at the sight of Crawford gripping their comrade. He did more than grip, however, for he brought up his knee in a furious blow, and the red figure went limp. Crawford dropped the body headlong into the flames, and two others darted in to rescue the senseless man. Maclish bellowed astounded curses, and Crawford fumbled to get

his left hand clear, but could not. He was helpless to free that hand, and so stood waiting, arm above head.

The three remaining redskins now abandoned their senseless comrade, obeyed the roars of Maclish, and brought in more wood. At this instant there occurred a singular and almost incredible thing. Across the firelit space glittered a swift flash of steel, gleaming more quickly than eye could follow. From the sapling which held Crawford's left wrist bound, came a slight thud. Crawford, startled, looked up to see a tomahawk sunk into the sapling—and his wrist was free.

The darkness gave birth to a horrible scream, the Mohegan war whoop. Already Maclish and the Stone Men were leaping for their weapons. A musket roared, and one of the warriors pitched down. Across the open space flitted the painted, half-naked figure of Le Talon, knife in hand, whoop rising into the night. Then Maclish roared at his men.

“Alone! He's alone, fools——”

A musket crashed. The two remaining Stone Men hurled themselves at the old Mohegan. By this time Crawford, well clear of the fire, had been guided to Maclish by that roaring bellow, and rushed at him barehanded, hurts and agony forgotten in a lust for blood. The frightful pain of his cracked and seared body only goaded him into more maddened fury.

Maclish had descried that blackened figure, and whirled to meet it. He drove in a blow to the burnt body that stopped Crawford with sheer shock of the pain; then lunged forward to finish it, knife glittering. In this play Maclish was too slow. Crawford, recovering, struck the

steel aside and launched a staggering blow which crushed lips and teeth and dyed the red beard a darker scarlet. Then the knife bit into him; in agonized frenzy of pain, he struck again and again, went staggering down with Maclish beneath him, and found his enemy limp and unresisting. Somehow, he had driven a blow home.

Crawford, impelled by a mad urge, tore at the man's clothes and next instant had the Star of Dreams in his hand. Now he groped for the fallen knife, seized it, and came to one knee for the blow. He paused, glancing around. One of the two Stone Men was motionless, Le Talon was locked with the other in grunting combat. So the old Mohegan was actually alone! A laugh shaking on his lips, Crawford lifted the knife to drive it home into Maclish—no silly thought of mercy now!

In the motion, darkness came upon him, and he pitched sideways. For an instant, as his hurt body rolled on the earth, his brain wakened to the sharp pain; then it was dulled again.

Five minutes afterward, he came to himself. His head was in the lap of Le Talon; the chief, still panting, was pouring water over his face. Crawford sat up, groaned sharply, then fought off the overmastering weakness and struggled to his feet.

"Maclish—where is he?"

"The Red Bull is gone. Careful! My brother is hurt and badly wounded." The Mohegan rose, put out an arm, caught Crawford as the latter reeled.

"Gone!" Fury roused Crawford anew. He still held the Star of Dreams, but the body of the Scot had disappeared. "After him, quickly! He can't go far—after

him, Mohegan! He must be destroyed at all costs——”

Calmly, Le Talon showed his right thigh, where a great knife-gash had ripped across the muscles in a hideous wound.

“The chief of the Loup nation is alone,” he said. His grave and impressive manner steadied Crawford at once, gave him immediate poise. “He cannot run through the woods after the Red Bull. His friends the Dacotah are not close; we must hurry to reach their camp before the Stone Men come upon us.”

Crawford swayed, then sank down weakly; Maclish had escaped him this time, and with good reason. He felt the chief running deft hands over his body, rubbing bear-grease from a little pouch into the burned skin, binding up a knife-slash across his ribs whose flow of blood had ebbed out his strength and robbed him of his prey. Presently Crawford rallied and returned these services, bandaging that frightful slash across the chief's thigh and learning how Le Talon had come to intervene at so opportune a moment.

The Mohegan had come with one party of Dacotah, while Frontin led another, sent by the Star Woman to meet Perrot and Crawford. Sighting the glow of Maclish's fire on the sky, the Mohegan had left his party to investigate. There had been no time to return and get the Dacotah—therefore he had acted after his own fashion. Now, rising, the chief collected the trophies which were his. One Stone Man had fallen to his musket, two to his knife. When he came to the groaning warrior whom Crawford had gripped, he calmly added the fourth scalp to his belt. Then he limped back.

"Ready! My brother's medicine is very strong. Where is Metaminens?"

Crawford rose, steadied himself under the giddy swirl of pain.

"I left him with Black Kettle and came on—they are behind the Assiniboines. He is well, but too weak to travel."

Crawford broke off in curses at thought of how Maclish had escaped him. Hopeless abandon came upon him, and with every movement sending fresh torture through his body, he made a brief gesture to the redskin.

"Leave me. Go on by yourself. No use trying to get away."

Le Talon, in one fierce glance, comprehended the situation. He smiled grimly.

"Very well, my brother shall see that a chief of the Loup nation does not fear to die with him."

"Plague take you!" Crawford laughed suddenly. "Lead the way, Sagamore, and I'll follow. You're right; I'll not whine like a sick dog because my hide is sore. After all, I have the Star of Dreams again!"

The chief picked up a musket, used it as a staff, and set out into the darkness.

The words of the Mohegan had summoned up all Crawford's iron will, and he drove himself onward. His upper body was a mass of sears and blisters, his skin cracked and blackened, his flesh scorched; the least movement sent quivers of agony through every complaining muscle and the knife-wound across his ribs had let out much of his strength. He set will to conquer flesh, and succeeded, though every slash of whipping tree-limbs and bushes in

the darkness brought new pain. Old Le Talon was scarce in better shape. That one knife-slash had nearly hamstrung his leg and each step was dragging torture, yet the grim chief forged ahead in silence, feeling his way by instinct toward the distant camp he had left.

For an hour the two men stumbled on, staggering, limping, slowly reaching the limit of mortal endurance. Then it was the Indian, whose fountain of strength was more severely drained, who gave way. Le Talon leaned on his musket and uttered a low groan.

"The eyes of Le Talon are dim," he said faintly.

"Send up a yell," gasped Crawford.

The chief lifted his head, drew a deep breath, sent a cry quavering toward the starry splendours above. Crawford, leaning weakly against a tree, suddenly started erect; to that cry came an answer, a response in a voice that he knew. A hoarse shout broke from him.

"Frontin! *Au secours!*"

"Ay, cap'n," came the faint reply.

Thus heartened, the Mohegan got out his firebag, got a spark in his tinder, got a tiny blaze running into the heart of a dead birch. In five minutes the fire was being hastily stamped out again, and Frontin was rushing up to them in the darkness, with him a dozen eager young Dacotah warriors—comprising both his own party and that of Le Talon. Frontin was bursting with news, and poured it out hurriedly in the darkness.

"We found the Star Woman, cap'n!" he exclaimed. "That's Le Talon with you, eh? We ran onto his camp and were waiting to get his report on the fire-glow in the sky. That rogue Maclish has a cursed big force of men—

we caught one of the Assiniboines and made him talk. Eighty or ninety warriors all told. We can't break through to reach Perrot."

"He's safe enough behind them," said Crawford.

"Death of my life! What's the matter with your voice, cap'n? You croak like an old raven. And there's a most devilish queer odour around here, like burned meat——"

Crawford broke into a laugh.

"Burned meat! For once you spoke a true word——"

Frontin caught him as he fell, still laughing, and passed into unconsciousness.

CHAPTER VI

SOME PROBLEMS ARE BEST LEFT UNSOLVED

A DREAM came to Crawford. It seemed that he lay beneath a huge pine, wind-twisted and curiously crooked, at the very brink of a dizzy cliff. Below and before him was outspread a magnificent panorama; a blue lake, blue as the sky, still and deep and very clear, and out beyond this mile after mile of green forest running up to the horizon, until green merged imperceptibly with blue.

As he lay here, it seemed that Phelim Burke came and stood before him. This was not the scarred and broken man he had last seen, but the laughing, gallant gentleman of earlier days, sword at side and joy of life sparkling in the gay eyes of him. Phelim stood there and smiled, took a pinch of snuff, chuckled at Crawford's astonished ejaculation.

"Faith, lad, did I not say I'd stay with ye? So here ye are, Hal, and here am I."

"Where?" asked Crawford in his dream.

"The end of our trail together, lad. Ye may deny the world, but escape it ye cannot. What's over the horizon for all men, Hal?"

"Death," said Crawford.

"Divil a bit of it," said Phelim cheerfully, and then walked away and was gone. So the dream passed, and

though others followed it, Crawford remembered only this one.

Therefore, when he opened his eyes and found himself conscious, he lay for a long while in perturbed wonder. There above him was the same contorted, twisted pine tree with its wide boughs; there was that same blue outspread lake, far below; and he looked out afar upon that same green forest that climbed the distant leagues to the horizon. He was softly couched on furs and fragrant pine. As he turned his head, he saw Frontin sitting there, watching him.

"Ah!" Frontin started to him, caught his hand. "Awake, eh? She said you'd wake this morning."

"Where's Phelim Burke?" demanded Crawford. "I tell you, he was just here——" and he swiftly related that dream of his. Frontin stared, then abruptly crossed himself.

"Dream? I'm not so sure. We're with the Star Woman. Here, you're to drain this cup, then I must tell her you're awake."

Crawford found a birch pannikin held to his lips, and drank. He lay back and fell asleep once more, but no further dreams came to him.

When he next wakened, it was in a glorious sunset that flooded the lake and outflung forest below with a mellow golden glow. Frontin was again with him, and gave him meat and corn, since his hunger was sharp and avid. Crawford sat up to eat; to his new astonishment he found himself, if not healed, at least able to move without pain. Frontin nodded curtly.

"Ay, you're well enough, cap'n. A week we've been

here—carried you and the chief. She has tended you both with simples and herbs; a wise woman, and beautiful to boot. There below us is the lake of many stars. Here's tobacco and your pipe."

"Give me your hand," said Crawford.

Frontin lent him a pull, and he gained his feet. Except for some weakness, and the sore stiffness of his hurt body, he was well enough. Something struck his breast; and, feeling beneath the leathern shirt that clothed him, he felt the Star of Dreams. A smile touched his lips. He leaned back against the bole of the twisted pine tree, took pipe and tobacco.

"Good. Can we talk with her?"

"Easily. She speaks French as good as my own—though devil take me if I understand how she came by it! She is but a girl."

"Why hasn't she left here? Has Maclish been stopped? What has happened?"

Frontin shrugged. "My faith, she is past my comprehension! She refused to run, and Maclish is upon us. She is like all saints and holy folk—a trifle blind in the material eye, and inclined to place more emphasis on the heavenly host than the occasion warrants. If you could see over the trees here, toward the west, you'd see the smoke of Maclish's campfires. His whole force is drawing in. Well, I'd better let her know that you're awake. She thinks that Perrot will bring the Dacotah hosts and prevent a fight. See if you can put any reason into her head."

With an air of sardonic gloom, Frontin departed, and disappeared in a thick grove of trees. Crawford per-

ceived that this cliff was a blunt point on the end of a long promontory jutting out above the lake. The little open space at the end, where he lay beneath the twisted pine, was solidly closed in by trees.

Crawford was staring out over the lake again when a quick, soft step made him turn, brought him to his feet. So he saw the Star Woman for the first time and stood astounded, silent; the sunset glow softened the sharp contour of his face, kindled a flame in his hair, quickened the deep blue of his eyes and the vibrant energy of him, so that she stared likewise as though beholding him for the first time.

To his absolute bewilderment, Crawford saw in her the actual person visioned by Moses Deakin, and the memory stabbed him. This was no ancient sorceress, no Indian hag nor even woman—but a slender girl, a creature all blue and gold, her skin white and golden, her eyes great pools of gold-flecked lapis, her hair brighter than the flame of sun, her fawnskin dress a rich unbeaded yellow. Between her breasts hung by its thong a huge star of hammered silver, all set with turquoise, stones of purest unflecked blue. Yet it was not the sheer beauty of her that held him awed, but the calm serenity that shone from her.

Suddenly her face changed, as though her astonishment was past. Crawford became sensible of the peculiarly piercing quality of her gaze, and he was disconcerted to find it not entirely friendly. When she addressed him in French, he could not mistake her attitude of quiet aloofness.

“I am glad you have recovered.”

"You are—you are the Star Woman?" murmured Crawford. "Impossible! Perrot said——"

"Perrot—Metaminens!" For an instant her face softened, became radiant and glorious; a sudden deep eagerness leaped in her eyes, an eagerness not untouched by pain. Then again she regarded him with that cool and aloof gaze. "How does he look? He is old?"

"Some men never grow old." Crawford was confused, staggered by all this. Surely this was not the woman Perrot had seen thirty years ago! He stood silent, wondering.

"What is your errand here?" she asked quietly. "I have talked with your friend Frontin, I know how you tricked Standing Bull into delivering my message to the wrong man, I know with what obstinate pertinacity you have fought across the wilderness to reach me—but why?"

"To see you," said Crawford, and under her steady gaze, words failed him for an instant. Then he rallied. "That is to say——"

"You are a hard man," she said, ignoring his stammer. "I quite understand why you have fled into this land from your own people. I know what you seek—and you will not find it. There is no peace over the horizon. Listen!" She held up one hand. Crawford, listening, heard the sound of distant gun-shots, saw swift distress flit into her face. "They are killing my friends the animals," she said in a mournful tone. "This has been a sanctuary for man and beast alike, until now; those Stone Men are murdering my friends. And are you better than they? There is no love in your heart, for I can see into it—I have seen into it while you lay sick and muttering. You do not love

your country, your fellow-men—anything! Have you ever loved, indeed? Have you any capacity for love? Or are you, too, one of the Stone Men?”

Crawford was taken terribly aback. Here, in the presence of this woman, he was suddenly speechless—he, who had dared call a king a poltroon to his very face!

He had never looked forward to his actual meeting with the Star Woman; he had left that to the future. Now he found himself indescribably impressed by the quiet poise, the splendid personality of this girl, who was hardly yet a woman. Her age, he guessed could not be much more than twenty—within a few years of it, at least.

He found himself strangely moved. It was as though she had some power which broke down all his hard shell of materialism, touching the very spirit within him. He suddenly understood why she was a person revered by all the red tribes. He felt that a touch of her hand would be a benison. Yet that final question of hers went straight down into the depths of his soul with its hurt, and the pipe fell unheeded from his hand. Once he had loved, indeed, and had seen his young wife stricken down by a bullet from Dutch William's troopers. And he had loved Phelim Burke——

“I am what God and man have made me,” he said, but the proud words faltered. Upon that, as he met her intent gaze, his face changed; the harshly masterful lines of it softened, and a swift glitter of tears stood in his blue eyes. And she, seeing these things, was startled. “You,” he went on softly, “you who ask—what then do you know of love?”

She put a hand to her breast, and Crawford was dimly

aware that he had given blow for blow. Somehow, this question had hurt her. A heartache sprang into her eyes.

"Ah! I think that there are two different men in you," she said quietly, and Crawford was astonished that she spoke of him, not of herself. "I have been angry because, had it not been for you, Maclish and those Stone Men might have stayed away. But I have been wrong, very wrong. You are not what I thought—you see, I have not looked into your eyes before this! After all, I think that you are an agent of destiny, which we cannot escape——"

Crawford started. "Perrot said that! And now you!"

"Perrot said that? Metaminens? All my life I have hungered to see Metaminens." Her voice lingered on the name with swift tenderness. Then she put out her hand and took that of Crawford, and a smile touched her lips gloriously. "And now he is coming, and it is you who bring him to me! Ah, I was wrong to be angry against you."

Crawford was astonished and bewildered. Perrot had seen this woman thirty years ago, and again ten years afterward—yet the thing was impossible, rankly impossible! She herself implied that she had never seen Perrot! Looking into her eyes, he could think only of Perrot's words: "I think she is a saint!" Upon him rushed the feeling that he was in touch with some deeply poignant mystery, that he was treading holy ground, that from enmity he had somehow won her to friendliness and confidence; and he was awed before her clear eyes.

"I do not wonder," he said slowly, "that men look up to you as a being apart!"

She smiled slightly and loosened her grip of his hand.

"And I do not wonder that men follow you gladly," she returned. "But no, no! I am only a woman, and to protect myself I manage to rule the tribes as I have been taught. I love them, I help them, I bring common-sense and what I have learned of healing and spiritual aid to their help—that is all. Because they believe in me, they find the help they seek."

"But who, then, taught you?" Crawford could not check his words. "Who showed you this trail? Where did you come from, you who are no Indian but a white woman?"

Her eyes widened a little. He saw that same hurt look come into them, that look of heartache and pain.

"Ah, I do not know!" she said softly. "I do not know, my friend. There is only one who could tell me; and some day my mother said he would come to tell me—Metaminens! There, look on the other side of this crooked tree, this sacred tree which the tribes worship as holy—you will see who taught me."

Crawford obeyed her gesture, and rounded the bole of that great tree. There, carved in the bark, he saw a cross, and below this a little mound of grassy earth.

His eyes were opened suddenly; a rush of emotion seized upon him, as he comprehended all that this girl did not comprehend. He understood that it was not she whom *Sieur Nicholas Perrot* had seen in past years, but another; now he remembered that veil which had dropped over *Perrot's* words, that swift checking of too impulsive speech; and he knew that he had been given to understand something which must not pass his lips. He silently took the girl's hand again and bowed over it, and as he

touched his lips to her fingers, they tightened on his. It was between them a tacit exchange of sympathy, of friendliness——

A burst of shots sounded, and the Star Woman twisted about.

“Oh! Come quickly.”

The magic spell was broken; the shots of the Stone Men were drums of materialism, grimly recalling Crawford to the present. He drew a deep breath and turned to accompany her toward the thick trees that fringed in the little point of rock. He brought himself to face what he knew well must be a desperate situation.

“How many men have you here?” he demanded, his thinly chiseled features tensed and alert once more. The Star Woman gave him a curious look, sensing the change.

“Standing Bull has fifteen of his young men here; Old Bear brought five warriors from the Teton clan, to the west. With you, Frontin, and the Mohegan, that makes twenty-five.”

“Have you healed Le Talon, then, as you have me?”

A sad smile touched her lips. “I cannot do more than is humanly possible. The chief’s leg will always be crippled, for flesh and muscles are shrunken.”

Now, in among the thick trees, the Star Woman pointed out her own lodge, a bark structure dimly visible to the left; Crawford gathered that this was some sort of a sacred grove, where she lived inviolate. Presently the trees thinned and they came to a clearing; here were the bark lodges of the Issanti Dacotah, and two hide tepees of the Teton clan.

Now Crawford understood the lay of the land, and for

a little there glowed within him a sudden flash of hope. All this abode of the Star Woman lay upon the apex of a rude triangle of rock—the lofty brow of a cliff that jutted out into the lake like a ship's prow, shielded on either converging side by precipitous descents to the land and water below. Across the base of this triangle the higher ground ran down steeply to the forest beyond; yet here there was a natural defence formed by a deep ravine which ran in from either side, leaving at the centre an open space of barely twenty yards in width. Crawford eyed all this with immense satisfaction, then saw Frontin approaching and turned.

At the edge of the grove, flooded with golden glory in the sunset light, were gathered some of the Star Woman's defenders—a number of Standing Bull's warriors, fitting thin iron heads to shafts for the bows; Old Bear and his handful of Tetons, wild and fierce men who carried round shields of hide; and seated against a tree was Le Talon, dressing his scalplock with grease and looking over his paint-pouch. Frontin came up, bowed with a certain air of deference to the Star Woman, and spoke to Crawford.

"How like you the situation, cap'n? Standing Bull and some of his warriors are scouting the enemy. We'll hear from them before dark."

"Things might be worse," and Crawford pointed to the narrow space between the ravines ahead. "There's the point to defend, with the ground falling away in front. Excellent! Who is in charge?"

"Ask madame," said Frontin, and Crawford turned to the Star Woman. To his surprise, she hesitated, anxiety in her face.

"I should like you to be in charge," she said. "And yet

—there must be no fighting if it can be avoided! Blood must not be shed in this place. It is sacred to me, and to the red men——”

As though to resolve her doubts, a thin, high yell arose from the forest below, where the green trees ran into hilly country. At sound of this yell, a delighted grunt went up from the Dacotah. One of them spoke out.

“That is the scalp-yell of Standing Bull; he has counted coup. *Was-te!* Good!”

“I leave everything in your hands,” said the girl hastily, an expression of despair flitting across her face. She turned to the warriors, ordered them to obey Crawford, and then walked in among the trees and vanished in the direction of her own abode. Frontin glanced after her with his darkly sardonic gaze, and shrugged.

“The olden fanes fall crumbling, the chatter of priests and the mystery of woman alike are withered and desolate in the breath of ambition,” he murmured. “That crooked pine-tree under which you lay, my cap’n, was a sacred tree among these people; blood must not touch this ground. Well, all that is ended! The white man has come into the land, and oddly enough he reveres the same symbol—a crooked Tree. The difference is, that his is stained with blood——”

Frontin broke off abruptly, as though fearing to trace his thought farther.

“Forget your moralizing and get to work,” said Crawford curtly. He walked over to Old Bear, and the Teton chief grinned at him in recognition. “Old Bear, put your warriors to work! A barricade must be laid across this narrow ground to-night. Frontin, have we any guns?”

“Half a dozen,” said Frontin. “Standing Bull and his

scouts are using them. Will you have the barricade laid with bastions and chevaux-de-frise in approved fashion——”

“Any way at all, so it be laid,” said Crawford. “What water and food have we?”

“A spring, and a fair stock of meat and corn.”

The warriors fell to work, with Old Bear and Frontin ordering them. Crawford walked across to the Mohegan, who met his eyes and chuckled.

“My brother is well again; that is good! His medicine is strong. To-morrow he shall see how a chief of the Loup nation dies, that he may tell Metaminens the story.”

“We’ll not die to-morrow,” said Crawford. “No word has come from Perrot or from the Dacotah to the south?”

“None. The place here is surrounded and cut off. Ah! Here is Standing Bull!”

Across the neck of ground appeared the old Dacotah chief, a number of warriors following with shrill yelps. He came to where Crawford stood, and a flash of exultation was in his eyes, as he touched the red object at his belt.

“We have taught the Stone Men a lesson,” he said. “My brother is well? Good. Did I not say that his medicine would bring him here?”

Crawford laughed. “You old rascal! I half believe you were right about it. You have left scouts to watch the enemy?”

“Yes. The Stone Men are making camp and cooking meat. Red Bull is with them.”

Crawford nodded. He knew that nothing short of death itself would stop Maclish.

CHAPTER VII

"AN ARCHER DREW BOW AT A VENTURE"

LATE that night, while the thin crescent of a new moon hung in the sky, touching the twisted limbs of the pine-tree above him with faint silver radiance, Crawford wakened to a lightly humming voice. It was Frontin who sat beside him at the tip of the promontory, and gaily voiced words which were half-sardonic, half-sad, fitting them to a tune of Old France which ran lightly and merrily enough—

"God made a little crooked tree
And set it on the shore,
A thing of wondrous sanctity
To paynim folk! But presently
Came white men full of charity,
Who gave the redskins eau-de-vie
All up and down the shore.

They built a chapel on the shore
Beside the crooked tree,
And taught the paynim to abhor
The gods by which his fathers swore—
It proved a simple labor, for
The Cross they gathered to adore
Was but a Crooked Tree!"

There was a bitterness in Frontin's voice that made Crawford sit up sharply.

"Anything wrong?"

"No. Go to sleep again, cap'n."

Instead, Crawford got out his pipe, borrowed fire from the other man, and they smoked together. After a little, with the peaceful solitude of the far-flung water and forest below acting upon him, Crawford broke the silence.

"See here, Frontin! If I don't get out of this, you make for the bay. Those Irishmen will be at New Severn——"

"Devil take you, be silent!" snapped Frontin roughly. "Listen! You hear the wind singing in those branches above us? Well, that is our requiem mass. We have failed in the world, and now God brings us to an end of the trail in this place—we have gained the glory of such a tomb as few men know, and the choral requiem of a sacred tree!"

"What the devil has put you in this mood?"

"The devil that is in me. Oh, I am sick, sick at heart!" broke out Frontin. "When I look into the eyes of this Star Woman, I am frightened. She is not of this earth. She is a fairy. She has been put here by magic—oh, the devil! I cannot understand it at all."

Crawford, who felt that he could understand it perfectly, held his peace. Suddenly a sharp sound drifted to them from somewhere far below, and was repeated.

"What is that noise?" Frontin started.

"The bark of a wolf," said Crawford.

Frontin jerked to his feet. "Then I have learned something," he said drily, "for until now I have never heard of a wolf swimming."

He strode away into the trees, and presently returned

with Standing Bull and two Dacotah warriors. They joined Crawford and listened. Once more that long wolf-call came up from the water below. At this moment another Dacotah hurried to join them, with eager words.

"Le Talon says that he hears the voice of his brother Black Kettle!"

Standing Bull uttered a sharp exclamation, and the three Dacotah vanished.

"There is a path down to the water," said the chief. Let us wait. If the Stone Men are down there, the path must be closed."

The three remained silent. They heard nothing more for a long space. The dark star-glinting lake, where all the constellations of the sky were mirrored in placid glory, gave up no further sound—until, abruptly, a musket crashed out from the shore below. Two made answer from the water, with ruddy flashes, and then pealed up a sharp chorus of yells. Again silence ensued, until Standing Bull spoke up.

"The Stone Men are on the lake in canoes. Fear not, my young men will close this cliff trail——"

A rumbling crash of rock, a yell, and then a triumphant Dacotah whoop came close on his words to show their truth. Again silence. Crawford waited, with hope tugging at him. If Black Kettle had arrived, Perrot and the Dacotah warriors under Yellow Sky must have come up!

The Star Woman and most of her men were hastily gathering to the scene, when the three Dacotah came climbing to the cliff-verge again, and with them two weary, wounded men. One was the Mohegan, Black Kettle; the other was a sub-chief from the southern villages of the

Dacotah. These came to the Star Woman and made report, while all around hung on their words.

"Yellow Sky and a hundred Issanti warriors are on the trail. They have Metaminens with them. He sent Black Kettle and Wounded Crane on ahead. Fifty others of The Men have gone around by the eastward of the lake, to cut off the Assiniboine retreat. It is the word of Metaminens that Red Bull be detained for two days. Before the second sun has set, Metaminens will be here."

Crawford caught a significant grunt from Frontin, and gave up hope. Two days would see a different end to this story! The Star Woman sent the new arrivals away with the other braves, and came to the two white men.

"You heard?" she exclaimed, a thrill in her voice. "Tell me, what is in the mind of Metaminens? What does he mean to do?"

"Save you from Maclish," said Crawford, "make peace with the Stone Men, and win them over to the French cause. How he can do that, remains to be seen."

"You do not know Metaminens, if you doubt him!" was her flashing answer. "So he needs two days? Then we must stop all fighting until he arrives."

"But Maclish must not know that he is coming," said Crawford, unwilling to dispel her confidence. She laughed softly and was gone in the darkness. Frontin uttered a low laugh.

"She wants peace, Perrot wants peace, Maclish wants peace—what beautiful irony! All three lose. She is too proud to pay the price of peace, Perrot will be too late to save us, and—who, then, will win the game?"

"Who, then?" demanded Crawford.

"Death," said Frontin gloomily. "We are the only ones to win, you and I! We win what we came here to seek. Meantime, go back to sleep, for to-morrow we work."

Crawford obeyed.

When sunrise broke, Crawford wakened much his old self, save for an unavoidable soreness. He interviewed Black Kettle and learned that Perrot was still too weak to travel fast, and the Dacotah would not go on without him; neither he nor they dreamed that the Star Woman was in acute peril.

The scouts reported that the force of Maclish was encamped without any immediate sign of attack. Crawford, after disposing his available force along the one assailable front, now protected by an excellent breastwork, joined them at breakfast and awaited the next move. Ere the meal was finished, the Star Woman appeared and came to Crawford and Frontin.

"We must send a messenger to Maclish at once," she said.

"Maclish is already sending one to us," rejoined Crawford. Her dark blue eyes widened upon him.

"How do you know?"

"I don't; but I know Maclish."

While she was still staring at him perplexedly, one of the scouts came leaping in across the breastwork with news. An Assiniboine chief had left Maclish's camp and was coming toward the spot. He was unarmed, carrying only belts and a roll of birchbark. Crawford smiled at these tidings, gave orders that the chief be brought in, and met the startled gaze of the Star Woman.

"You see, I spoke truly. Do you imagine that we are masters of this situation? Not at all, I assure you."

"I will go out and see this man Maclish——"

"Then, understand what will happen!" Crawford spoke sternly, gravely, his tone startling her anew. "He will seize you, and will then have everything. Do you imagine that he has any respect or reverence for you? He is an animal, an animal! If you do not believe me, ask Frontin, who knows him."

She believed him and said no more; only a perceptible pallor crept over her face as she waited, and deepened there.

There was no long delay. Presently the chief of the Stone Men was led forward by two of the Dacotah scouts. He was a young man, naked to the waist, bearing two long bead belts around his neck and carrying a rolled strip of bark. He came to the Star Woman, met her gaze with grave dignity; then, removing his belts, he delivered them. He spoke in the Dacotah tongue, which Standing Bull translated for Crawford and Frontin.

"I bring you a belt from our father Maclish, called Red Bull," he said, handing the first belt to the Star Woman. "It says this: 'Place yourself in my hands and avoid the shedding of blood. I will take you into my lodge and you shall have honour among the Stone Men. The Dacotah and their brethren the Stone Men shall dwell in peace together, and their nation will become great. A tree of peace shall be planted whose branches will overshadow all the western country. If you assent to this, return yourself with my messenger.' Thus says the first belt.

"Here is the second belt," and the envoy held out one composed of black beads. "This is what it says. 'If you do not return with my messenger; if you do not come to me at once, then I will come and take you. All those men with you shall go into the kettles of the Stone Men. You cannot escape me, and the blood of your young men will be upon your head.' Thus speaks the second belt."

Now Crawford had on this morning hung the Star of Dreams outside his shirt, since the metal irked his tender new skin. The Assiniboine glanced around, saw the jewel, and in silence held out his roll of birch to Crawford, who took it. The Star Woman came to him, bitter anxiety in her eyes, yet with a proud anger flaming behind the anxiety.

"You have heard those belts? I cannot give myself to this man—sooner would I leap into the lake below! How can we gain time?"

"We cannot," said Crawford grimly, and unrolled the birch. "Now let us see what message the Red Bull has sent to me."

He studied the scrawl in the fresh-peeled bark, and then read it aloud, translating it into French that all might comprehend. To the woman who listened at his elbow with bated breath, to the dark warriors standing around, that message came with a blunt shock—a shock which betrayed the whole truth to them.

"Make her yield to me, and I will spare you and Frontin. I have you surrounded and will grant no quarter to others; not one of the Nadouissieux must live to tell of this matter.

If she will not yield, then persuade her out to speak with me, and you shall still be spared. Refuse, and I finish the torture that I began a while back."

The red men standing around uttered a low chorus of grunts and waited. Crawford looked up, met the lapis eyes of the Star Woman, found them wide with horrified comprehension.

"You understand?" he said gravely. "This fool thinks me coward enough to buy my life with you; yet he means to keep no promises. It is essential to his scheme that none of your warriors should remain alive to tell the Dacotah the truth—and he means to murder me as well, despite these promises."

The Star Woman tried to speak, and the words died on her lips. Then, at the third attempt, she made hoarse response.

"But Metaminens! We must gain time—if I went out to meet this man——"

"You would be seized, your men would lose heart, and be slain. There is only one way in which we can gain time."

Crawford touched his knife significantly, and a grunt of assent broke from the braves. Then all were silent, awaiting her response.

This was slow in coming. Despair swept the face of the girl, followed by a swift flush of anger; but this ebbed away instantly, and was succeeded by a deathly pallor. Now, beyond all evasion, the Star Woman perceived that she must abandon everything, that peace and temporizing were alike impossible, that there was but one issue. Craw-

ford spoke again, since he dared not risk any misunderstanding in her mind.

"Maclish knows better than to trust himself among us. You can still win the whole game—at a price. Yield to his terms, go to his camp, put yourself at his mercy; and peace will follow. True, we others will be slain none the less—yet there will be peace until Perrot comes to take vengeance. Then what?"

To this bitter speech, Frontin added cool, sardonic words which bit far deeper than he could know.

"Madame, this affair is perfectly simple—it is as logical and dispassionate as a problem in geometry! Look you, now. Our only possible hope is in *Sieur Perrot*, is it not? Well, *Perrot's* only possible hope is in us *likewise!* This *Maclish* will attack, and then what happens? With luck, we shall kill him; certainly, we shall do our best. Perhaps he will kill us. In any case, neither he nor we can win this game. But if we can hold out a little while, *Perrot* may yet find you alive. So the only one who can win this game is *Perrot*—*voilà!*"

In the startled silence that ensued, the *Assiniboine* envoy, who spoke no French, stabbed with curious eyes at *Crawford*, the *Star Woman*, the chiefs around. *Frontin's* words brought home to them that there was only one wild, desperate hope left—not for them, but for *Perrot*. If they chose to die here, then the *Star Woman* might or might not remain alive until *Perrot* came. In any case, *Perrot* and the *Dacotah* host would strike *Maclish* like a thunderbolt, all unperceived, and could dictate his own terms. *Crawford* laughed a little.

"And I thought Perrot's dream was impossible!" he murmured.

A swift glory leaped into the lovely face of the Star Woman. She, who all her life had heard so much of Perrot, yet who did not know the true reason of her longing to see that man, suddenly leaped at this one forlorn hope.

"I play the hand of Metaminens!" she exclaimed, her eyes flashing around the circle of dark faces. "That is my decision—yet I cannot command you to die, my friends. Wandering Star, I leave this matter to you. Return a belt to Maclish in my name."

Then, not awaiting the issue, she turned and passed among the trees toward the grave that lay beneath the crooked pine. Crawford, in turn, spoke to Standing Bull.

"I choose to fight it out, Dacotah. Make what answer you like to the Stone Men."

Standing Bull had no need to ask the temper of the warriors around. Teton and Issanti and Mohegan, all fastened upon him a fiercely exultant regard. Le Talon alone was quite indifferent; seated against his tree, he was calmly streaking his features with vermilion as though quite certain of the outcome. Standing Bull took from his belt the grisly trophy which he had fetched in the previous evening, and handed it to the Assiniboine.

"The scalps of the Stone Men are like the feathers of crows," he said. "A chief of The Men does not care to keep them. Take this to your chiefs as a belt from the Star Woman. To the Red Bull take this message." And unstopping his powder horn, he sprinkled on the scalp a few grains of powder."

"We have kettles for you all," returned the Assiniboine. "To-night we shall feast upon the hearts of the Dacotah." Then, stalking away, he leaped the barricade and was gone with a shrill yelp.

"Quick, now!" Crawford was at the side of the Dacotah chief with swift orders. "Put ten of your men at the breastwork with all the muskets. Frontin, take a gun! Black Kettle has his own. Send out the other warriors to oppose their advance; tell them to fall back on the position here and to save themselves so far as possible."

While these directions went into effect, Crawford, who knew himself still unable to endure the heavy recoil of a musket, provided himself with several tomahawks and took post at the center of the barricade, where Frontin and Black Kettle joined him. Standing Bull himself was gone into the trees beyond with his scouts. Now Crawford heard the voice of Le Talon, and saw the crippled chief limping to him. There, his injured leg bolstered up, Le Talon stood facing the clearing beyond, his voice rising and falling in a weird monotone as it lifted to the morning sky the recital of his deeds and trophies.

Then, suddenly, a musket banged in the forest, followed by others. The Stone Men could have little ammunition left, and what they had was now being rapidly expended. Bullets clipped the high trees, while Crawford and his men waited for the battle to be broken upon them; and on the ground in little sheaves lay the scarlet arrows which were the peculiar token of the Star Woman. Yells resounded, and among them Crawford thrilled to the bull-like roar of Maclish.

Now came Standing Bull, darting from the trees and

leaping over the barricade, reaching for arrows to fill his empty quiver.

"Wah!" he panted, fiercely exultant. "They come—all of them!"

Among the trees appeared other of the Dacotah, fighting as they retreated, arrows flashing around them. Man by man they came in—but not all of them. Five had fallen. A long yell shrilled up from the trees as the enemy sighted the barricade and paused.

"Fire one at a time, and low," commanded Crawford.

On the word, the Stone Men came bursting from cover in one wild charge, as though to overwhelm the defenders in a great wave, with the roar of Maclish to spur them on. Stripped and painted, arrows and bullets hurtling over them into the barricade, the solidly massed redskins came pouring across the clearing, converging on the narrow line of felled trees.

"Let fire," said Crawford, and Frontin dropped a chief who was in the lead.

The muskets spouted white flame and smoke; at that short distance even the Dacotah could not miss, and their bullets ploughed furrows of death through the enemy. The hum and twang of loosened bowstrings, the whistling song of feathered shafts, the panting grunts of men, rippled down the line; those short, powerful Teton bows, which could send a shaft through and through a bison, uttered a deeper and more vibrant note. The Assiniboine whoop changed to a death-yell. Their vanguard stumbled, melted away, plunged headlong. A red wall of the dead formed up, across which mounted the living ranks be-

hind, only to catch anew the full sweep of those scarlet shafts which pierced two men at once.

None the less, they swept forward in stubborn fury, rolled on to the barricade, paused there like a breaking wave and then crested above it. As that tide of men burst high and fell inward, Crawford gave up all for lost.

He drove out with his keen little axes, sending each through the air like a lance of living light, each one driving home relentlessly and surely. A Dacotah beside him gasped and fell under a stone club; Crawford axed the slayer, saw Le Talon engaged with two stocky Assiniboines, heard the Mohegan yell volley up. No sign of Maclish caught his eye. Behind the storm of tumultuous figures, the Tetons drove out with their long lances, though Old Bear was now down, stabbing and stabbed in red ruin.

Then, like a flash, all was changed. A new yell arose—men paused, staring. Crawford turned, to see the Star Woman coming from the trees, coming forward to the barricade. At sight of her the Stone Men hesitated—then the reloading was accomplished, the muskets began to roar again, bowstrings twanged, scarlet shafts pierced swift and deep. Those of the enemy who had mounted the barricade were swept away, and upon the others poured a deadly rain. These could endure no longer. It was not their mode of warfare, and their fanatic exultation was blasted by the fearful toll of death. Their ranks melted, and they were gone.

Crawford glanced down the line, lips compressed. Le Talon was dead, with his two assailants. Old Bear was

gone. Four Tetons remained, with Standing Bull and five Issanti. Crawford turned to the Star Woman.

"Back!" he said sternly. "We cannot risk——"

Her eyes met his gaze steadily, and a smile was on her lips.

"I remain here with you and with my men," she said quietly. Crawford knew better than to oppose, and changed his tactics instantly.

"Very well," he said. "But we cannot hold this barricade now—the next rush will end it. Back to the trees, all of us! We must make ready to hold the point of the cliff. That will be our last defence."

She comprehended, and turned back to the grove. Crawford sent Standing Bull and the Dacotah after her, then turned to Frontin and Black Kettle, who were unhurt.

"Load all the muskets and hold this barricade," he said quietly.

"Ay, cap'n," rejoined Frontin, laughing a little.

Crawford waited. Already the arrows were singing in from the trees, and presently he saw that which he had feared. The Stone Men were taking advantage of the ravine at either side the clearing; sheltered there, they began to pour in a steady fire upon the barricade, in the centre of which remained Frontin and Black Kettle. As the muskets began to crash out their message, Crawford withdrew to the trees of the sacred grove, an arrow burning his arm ere he reached the cover.

He passed in among the trees. Then, ahead of him, he saw the Dacotah grouped, saw them open out as he approached. Amid them, half hidden by the hanging

limbs of a cedar, he saw something fair and yellow. An oath dashed from his lips, and he leaped forward to kneel beside the Star Woman.

From the centre of that star of silver and turquoise which hung against her breast protruded the feathered shaft of an arrow.

Crawford looked up at Standing Bull. "Carry her back there, beneath the crooked pine; the turquoise star has deflected the arrow—she may live. I will come to her. Set your men to work felling trees. Hurry!"

The Dacotah obeyed in dark silence.

CHAPTER VIII

SOMETIMES SUNRISE CAN COME TOO LATE

NOON passed into afternoon, and still the outer barricade remained untaken, for Black Kettle and Frontin held it. They were excellent shots, and with two Dacotah to keep the muskets loaded, they twice checked half-hearted charges and searched the farther trees and the lips of the ravine with deadly bullets. Maclish could not prod his men to face that barricade again, after the fearful loss of the first attack. Having fired away their last powder and exhausted their initial ardour, the Stone Men kept up a sullen discharge of arrows and would do no more.

The Star Woman, who had lost much blood but was in no danger, lay at the verge of the cliff under the crooked tree, near the sleeping-place of her mother; and she, too, slept in an exhausted slumber. Crawford, who had tended her wound, was glad enough to have it so, for his hands were full.

He laboured with the Dacotah, though in grim certainty of the end; the Star Woman's wound from a chance shaft had filled them all with deadly fury. Standing Bull sent up repeated signal smokes, hoping that Perrot's war-party would see them, but as the afternoon drew on, no response came from those leagues of silent green forest outspread beyond the lake of many stars. And, now and

again, to the musketry of Frontin and Black Kettle rang out the death-yells of the Stone Men.

Where the sacred grove thinned out toward the sacred tree, Crawford laid his second breastwork, enclosing the tip of the craggy triangle. Tree after tree crashed down and was laid in position, wide boughs projecting. When this had been done, the warriors fell to work collecting old shafts or making new ones, inserting sharp flints into the ball of each warclub or *casse-tete*, stoically preparing for the last fight here at the crooked tree.

The wounded warrior squatting beside the couch of the Star Woman sent a call to Crawford. He came to her quickly, knelt beside her; in his bronzed features was a great tenderness, and his fingers touched her brow, smoothing back the golden hair.

"You must stay quiet, Star Woman!"

She smiled a little. "Fear not, Wandering Star. In my sleep I have called Metaminens, and he is coming."

"Can you reach him where signal-smokes have failed, then?" asked Crawford bitterly. She put her hand to his, gripping his fingers.

"I am sorry that at first I did not understand what sort of man you are, Wandering Star; I did not guess what tenderness could be in you. I am only a weak woman, fighting the world with what weapons are mine, as my mother taught me. Now—I have thought of how to prevent more bloodshed, to save you and these others."

Crawford's steel-blue eyes hardened slightly. "How?"

"Maclish does not know that Metaminens is coming, and he will be trapped by to-morrow. Send him word that I am dying; let one of his men come and see me

wounded. The Stone Men will be frightened, and Maclish will not know what to do——”

“No,” said Crawford. “Maclish means to have you alive or dead; he has gone too far to draw out now. If he knew that the Dacotah host was coming, he and the Stone Men might flee—but he would refuse to believe it, from our lips. Even if he believed it, he would attack us at once, in order to seize you and so buy his safety from Perrot. There is no way out of this imbroglio, Star Woman—except to hold out while we can.”

The eyes of the girl closed.

“You are right. I will send out my spirit to reach Metaminens, as my mother used to do. It is our only hope.”

Crawford stood for a moment regarding the girl, wondering at her words. He remembered how Perrot had spoken of the Star Woman’s influence in his life. Could it be that Perrot was the father of this girl? Then whence had come her mother—a white woman, certainly? That would never be known now, for this girl herself knew nothing of her past.

As he stood, those glorious lapis eyes opened, swept up to meet his gaze, and a smile touched the lips of the Star Woman. In this smile, this look, there passed between the two something more than words could have told—a touch of the spirit beyond any speech. Then Crawford found the Dacotah chief at his elbow.

“My brother Black Kettle is calling!”

“Come.” With Standing Bull, Crawford turned to the trees of the grove, and rapidly passed among them, suddenly conscious that muskets had been banging all this

while. When they sighted the outer barricade, Frontin saw them, wiped his powder-blackened face, and shouted:

"Four charges left, cap'n!"

"Come in, then."

Followed by a hail of shafts, Frontin and the Mohegan came bounding across to the trees, carrying a musket each. From the outer forest was ascending a din of shouts, yells, long chorused chants, pierced by the bellow of Maclish. Crawford understood that the Stone Men were working themselves up to battle fury, singing the scalp dance, preparing for one final assault. He turned to Standing Bull.

"Call up your men. When the enemy come, let them take the outer breastwork, but hold the grove, falling back on the last defence. Frontin, go back to the crooked tree with the muskets. We must check them there until morning."

Hardly had he spoken, when an up-pouring yell and a whistle of shafts betrayed that the Stone Men were advancing. Now the Dacotah came darting forward to occupy the grove, and as they did so, the enemy poured into sight from the farther trees, sending a hail of shafts over the breastwork into the grove, and Crawford caught a glimpse of Maclish urging them on from the rear.

Now the bows thrummed, and the long shafts sang down the level sunlight of waning afternoon. Men stumbled and died, or leaped in midair like stricken deer; but the defenders were all too few. Up to the outer barricade swept the yelling flood, paused for an instant, and then came surging over. Crawford shouted his men back, hurled his axe into the brain of the nearest Assiniboine, then went leaping for cover. Pealing up yells of triumph,

the Stone Men burst across the barricade and flooded in upon the grove.

There again the bowstrings twanged, and shafts whistled fiercely into naked bodies, but there was no checking this assault. Through the grove swept the Stone Men, scarcely checked by the Dacotah arrows. Crawford gained the breastwork, defending the last bit of ground around the crooked tree, and was joined there by Standing Bull and four warriors. The others were gone.

No orders were needed. The Dacotah caught up fresh arrows, Frontin and Black Kettle lay with matches alight. As the grove vomited forth the oncoming Stone Men, the four last charges of powder roared out one by one, arrows flew as fast as fingers could work the strings. Smitten by this blast of death, dismayed to find a fresh barricade facing them, the Assiniboines paused, wavered, broke back abruptly to cover. The storm abruptly ceased, the bellow of Maclish quelling the arrow-flight. The sun was just sinking from sight behind the western trees.

"Habet!" With a wild laugh, Frontin pointed to Standing Bull. The old chief quietly fell forward, with the point of an arrow emerging from his back, and was dead. "Seven of us left in all, cap'n. Hurt?"

"No."

"Then I am. Come and cut out this shaft."

Startled, Crawford sprang to Frontin's side and saw that his friend was pierced through, below the right shoulder. With his knife, he slashed at the crimsoned arrow-head; Frontin gripped the feathered shaft and drew it out. At this instant the voice of Maclish roared up from among the trees of the sacred grove.

"Ahoy, Crawford! Art there yet?"

"Aye, Maclish," returned Crawford. "Come out and settle it with me, you devil!"

"Not I." Maclish laughed jeeringly. "We're going to burn two of your men to-night. With sunrise we'll finish it. Tell the Star Woman that I'll take her in the morning!"

Silence fell. Frontin grinned and put the message into French for the redskins, while Crawford tied up his wound.

"We have a respite until morning, cap'n! And well earned and dear bought, say I. He's got two of our wounded men and will burn them to hearten his devils. Well, this time to-morrow night we'll be burning too."

In the last lingering light, two of the wounded warriors built up a last forlorn signal-smoke; but from the silent forests across the lake, now purpling in the twilight, came no response, and the horizon was bare. The darkness fell. Behind the barricade now remained Crawford, Frontin, Black Kettle and four Dacotah braves. They had a little water, not much; this was saved for the Star Woman. Crawford took it to her with a scrap of food, as she lay beneath the crooked tree. She had just wakened, and her voice in the darkness thrilled him.

"Let the food wait. I have summoned Metaminens, called him; he is coming now. When the sun lifts over the east, he will come."

"And except that two men are burning, we would be gone," thought Crawford, but did not voice his thought. Nor did he seek any explanation of how she could summon Metaminens; there was in this girl more of mys-

tery than he could fathom—and in the touch of her hand more of allure than he dared admit.

So as he sat beside her in the night, they talked a little space of the mother that she had lost; and Crawford spoke of the Irish girl whom he once had loved, and the name of Metaminens arose between them.

“He will be here at sunrise, and I shall see him!” said the Star Woman, and sighed. And at this Crawford leaned over and touched his lips to her forehead, and so left her. The Dacotah came and built up a little shelter of pine boughs above her, and she slept.

To the little group of wounded and desperate men who waited there by the crooked tree, the dark hours drew on terribly. From the sacred grove gleamed the lurid glow of fires, while the fierce laughter of the Stone Men told of the grim work going on there; and once the sharp scream of a man in mortal agony came wrenching through the darkness, but only once. Then, after midnight, silence fell, and Crawford slept a little.

In the rustling greyness of dawn, when mist-shadows were stealing up from the lake and the contorted shape of the sacred pine hung black against the paling sky, Crawford was wakened by Black Kettle.

“My brother, it is time. The Star Woman is awake, also.”

Crawford rose, shook himself, went to the little shelter of boughs.

“It is certain,” said the Star Woman quietly, looking up at him. “When the sun lifts, Metaminens will be here. Tell the others.”

Crawford told them, but they only grunted; those redskins had no illusions now.

The dawn increased, and up the eastern sky pierced the first reddened lance-tips of the day. Black Kettle divided with the four Dacotah the remaining arrows, and waited. Frontin and Crawford smoked. From the sacred grove beyond the breastwork arose a murmur of voices, among them lifting the deep tones of Maclish. One of the Dacotah, listening, uttered a curt laugh and translated.

"They say the Red Bull is a coward; they will not attack unless he leads them."

As though in response, a burst of yells lifted from the trees.

"Coming!" said Frontin, and knocked out his pipe.

The seven ranged themselves behind the fallen trees, arrows on string, long war-clubs ready, tomahawk and knife at belt; Crawford stood in the centre, Frontin and the Mohegan to either side of him. The pealing whoop of Black Kettle made fierce answer to the yells, and then across the opening came a rush of dark figures.

Now the Dacotah bows thrummed and sang for the last time, and the biting shafts flew fast; no arrows made answer, for Maclish wanted to take the Star Woman alive. The eastern sky was all aflame with scarlet and gold, and full day was breaking. Stumbling across their dead, the Stone Men flooded onto the breastwork, crashed amid the boughs, and came storming over it. And at their head, hurling himself madly forward, was Maclish, axe in hand.

Crawford waited, crouching, laughing softly to himself. He did not move as the burly Scot smashed into the tangle

of tree-limbs, until he saw that red-bearded animal's face lift into sight not three feet from him—then, rising suddenly, he flung himself out and grappled his enemy.

It was axe to axe, fist to fist, man to man, while about them the tide of battle rolled unheeded and unheeding. Crawford flashed his axe, felt it torn from his hand, and whipped out his knife. Steel was biting him, but he felt it not. He bore the Scot backward, laughed into the contorted face, drove home his knife again and again until he was amazed to find that his work was done. Before the wild ferocity of the attack, Maclish crumpled up and gasped, and died cursing.

Scarce realizing the fact, Crawford scrambled back across the barrier and stood to wipe the blood from his face. Then he went staggering under the knife-thrust of an Assiniboine who struck him from behind, following the blow with a leap. Crawford met the leap with his knife, dashed the warrior aside, and stood reeling. The last Dacotah was down, still struggling under a heap of bodies, while Frontin and Black Kettle fought their way toward the crooked tree at the point of the cliff.

Black Kettle gave his death-yell to the crashing impact of a war-club, and vanished. Then Crawford, forgotten, picked up a fallen club and rushed into the thick of the *mêlée*. He reached Frontin, struck aside a leaping warrior, and together they reached the crooked tree beside the little shelter where the Star Woman lay. There against the twisted pine they stood back to back, while the Stone Men surged in upon them and drew away again, awed by the dark man who laughed as he wielded crimsoned knife, and the other man with blazing eyes and the

great star shimmering at his throat as the club swung. Awed for a moment only—then they closed in.

Knife bit delicately, with the deadly precision of a rapier; club thudded and crashed; men died and lay broken, ringing in the pair who fought. The flood surged in again and again, only to be beaten back, shattered, hurled aside from that ring of dead. In again it came, relentless and maddened. Frontin, staggering under a smashing blow, went to his knees, reeled back gasping against the tree-bole. Crawford swung his weapon, but blood was on his hand and it slipped away. He dragged at his knife, drove out with it again and again at the rimming circle of faces—and for the last time that flood drew back. Frontin staggered up.

“Can ye see Phelim Burke now?” he croaked, with a ghastly laugh.

A vibrant note made answer and Frontin lay back against the crooked tree, pinned to it by a shaft whose feathered end stood out of his breast. A stone axe hurtled in air, and Crawford staggered. He threw out his hands and fell forward, and lay across the little arbour of the Star Woman, who caught him in her arms as he fell.

Then the sun rose, and Metaminens came.

CHAPTER IX

WHEN A STAR FALLS, A SOUL HAS PASSED

SIEUR NICHOLAS PERROT came along, making his way among the strewn bodies, to the crooked tree; he wavered a little as he came, for weakness was still heavy upon him. No other was in sight, but from the depths of the forest around came the stabbing reports of guns, the yells of men, the fierce wacry of the Dacotah warriors, rolling afar in a gradually lessening rout of receding slaughter. None of the Stone Men would return to their own villages from the lake of many stars, and from this day forward the enmity between Dacotah and Assiniboine would never die down. So the dream of Sieur Perrot had ended, after all, in failure.

Perrot came to a sudden halt, aghast at what he beheld and heard. Of the Star Woman he could see nothing, for she lay unconscious beneath Crawford's body. But there in the morning sunlight stood Frontin, bleeding from a dozen wounds; having torn himself from the shaft that pinned him to the tree, Frontin leaned on a broken musket, laughing horribly at Perrot. Now, lowering an almost useless hand, Frontin stooped and picked up an object that lay beside the silent figure of Crawford. It was the Star of Dreams.

"Dead!" said Frontin thinly. "Dead!"

Perrot crossed himself and tried to speak, but could not.

With a shuffling step, Frontin came to the verge of the cliff and swayed a little, the musket escaping from his grip. The man was dying where he stood, and Sieur Perrot was frozen by the sight.

"Well, M. Crawford was right!" Faint as was the voice, it was Frontin's old cool, sardonic tone. "He followed the Star of Dreams—and it led him across the horizon to which all men must attain. Yes, he was right; he alone has won this game! If you will regard the smile on his lips, my dear Perrot, you will see that he is happy. I think you are Sieur Perrot? Of course."

An inarticulate word escaped the older man, then he checked himself. Frontin held up the Star of Dreams, so that the level morning sunlight striking across the far forest leagues below drew from it a shimmer of flame. He swayed suddenly, then caught himself.

"Ah, my captain, my captain!" he said mournfully. "What was it—an agent of unseen destiny? *Eh, bien!* You played the game, you won your fight. Fall, my star, fall! When a star falls, they say, a soul has passed——"

Frontin jerked his hand. The jewel flew out into the air, blazed for an instant with a swift sheen of green and gold, then was gone with a long flash to the lake below. Frontin staggered for the second time, and looked sideways at Perrot.

"My dear Sieur Perrot," and his words were little more than a whisper, "when you go to court, and they ask whether you have encountered M. le Marquis de Sazerac in the New World, you may say to them that—he followed—the Star of—Dreams——"

His knees were loosened, and he suddenly pitched for-

ward and was gone from sight. The echo of his wild laugh floated up from the depth, and that was all.

Sieur Nicholas Perrot clutched the crucifix at his breast, and closed his eyes, trembling. His lips moved silently.—then he suddenly lifted his head and looked up. A sound came to his ears. He started violently.

“Metaminens!”

Now, suddenly seeing what he had failed to see, Perrot threw himself forward and a cry broke from his lips. He hurled the brush aside, and met the gaze of the Star Woman. Eyes distended, he caught her hand, stared at her, babbled frightened words.

“You—you—ah, it is not you at all!” he exclaimed incoherently.

The Star Woman sat up. With one arm she held the body of Crawford, which lay across her knees, the other hand she extended to Perrot.

“Metaminens!” A glory was in her eyes. “It is you! Here, look to him quickly—he is not dead—I can feel his heart beating——”

Perrot awoke to action. He turned Crawford over and swiftly examined the hurt body.

“No—he is not dead. He will not die if——”

His eyes fell upon the star of silver and turquoise that hung across the bandaged breast of the Star Woman. A deathly pallor came into his face. He reached out and touched the star.

“You—yes, it is you after all——”

“Look to him, quickly!” cried the girl, and then fell back, her eyes closed.

Perrot glanced at Crawford and shrugged. “You are

far from death, my friend," he murmured. Leaning forward, he touched the breast of the girl, nodded reassuringly as he felt her heartbeat, then looked for a long moment into her quiet face.

When he rose and stood erect, the grey-bearded cheeks of Sieur Nicholas Perrot were sparkling with tears. In his eyes lay a great wonder, and a greater heartache.

"Her daughter—her daughter!" he said softly. "And I never knew! Now I have come too late—she will never know, and how can I tell her? Metaminens is no more—his work is done, his heart is broken and dead, his body is outworn, his spirit is weary. Oh, Star Woman, you who have gone across the horizon—wait for me! Your daughter has found her destiny in this man—leave the future to them, and wait for me, Star Woman! I shall not be long in coming to you. Not what has been, my Star Woman, but what will be—what will be——"

So Perrot stood there, with bowed head, until Crawford groaned and stirred. Then, brushing the tears from his grey beard, Sieur Nicholas Perrot knelt to his work. And above him the morning breeze lifted the singing pine-needles of the crooked tree, as though up there a voice whispered back to him——

"What will be!"

THE END





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